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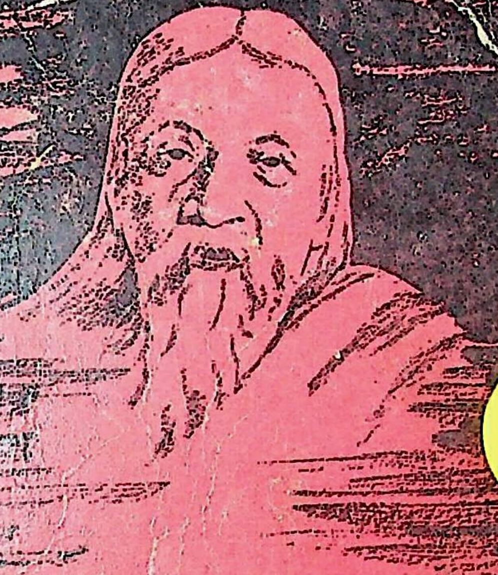

Sri Aurobindo
came to me
(REMINISCENCES)

DILIP KUMAR ROY

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BANARAS.

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SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME

"For thou hast conquered, at the journey's end,
"The Sun-elixir to quell the hordes of Night.
"Who once have seen thy Face have known, O Friend :
" 'Tis not a myth that Love is one with Light."

* * *

"This is the Aurobindonian Gospel according to Dilip—St. John. It is an indispensable book to all admirers of Sri Aurobindo and his works."

—K. R. S. Iyengar

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SRI AUROBINDO
CAME TO ME

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DEDICATION

To our beloved President,

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

O noble judge, who declinest to condone
The demon passions that blur God's sky of peace
And yet canst understand why men are prone
To outlaw the heights and acclaim the dread abyss!

Thy windows are open to the soul's pure white
Vast firmament of faith no doubts can mar;
A contemplative of compassion's light,
Thou sing'st: "None but true lovers win the Star

Of Love whose unique miracle alchemy
Can resolve Hate's anarchy into a Harmony."

Hari Krishna Mandir — D. K. Roy
Poona-5 — March, 1963

DR. SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN:

Aurobindo was the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force of the life of the spirit. India will not forget his services to politics and philosophy and the world will remember with gratitude his invaluable work in the realms of philosophy and religion.

NETAJI SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE:

Sri Aurobindo is a *dhyani*, a contemplative and, I feel, goes even deeper than Vivekananda, though I have a profound reverence for the latter. (From a letter written in Bengali to Sri Dilip Kumar Roy from Mandalai Jail).

RABINDRANATH TAGORE:

At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it. . . . His face was radiant with an inner light. . . . I felt the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him: "You have the word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world: 'Hearken to me'." . . .

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

(In a letter to Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, dated, 17.12.1941 from London): I am, indeed, grateful to you for having sent me the book (*Life Divine*). I consider it the greatest book which has been produced in my time. . . . I have today written to the Royal Swedish Academy recommending him for the Nobel Prize.

MADAME GABRIELE MISTRAL

Nobel Laureate:

In the midst of personal sorrow, Aurobindo brought me to religion. It may sound quaint that a non-Christian should have opened the way to my religious consecration, but Aurobindo did. . . . Every people must have an Aurobindo, a man far above the people and yet identified with the aspirations of the people. . . . My debt to India is very great and is due in part to Aurobindo.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

(From a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy from New York 16.6.68). I will find out what is being done about the Nobel Prize recommendation and add a word of my own in favour of the *Life Divine*, which I regard as a book not merely of the highest importance as regards its content, but remarkably fine as a piece of philosophic and religious literature.

PREFACE

(First Edition)

Somebody said that this was an auto-biography. I hasten to disclaim the characterisation at the very outset. I have only reminisced about my Gurudev, Sri Aurobindo, as I hope will be obvious to any reader. An auto-biography has a purpose which goes beyond the purview of reminiscences. Besides, I have, in the main, confined my reactions to and reflections on the great personality who inspired them with but one end in view: to bring out his greatness as it dawned on me and grew with my own growth in the course of my day-to-day spiritual struggles and aspiration. In other words, I have essayed to portray, by and large, my interactions with him in the context of an Ashram life.

But interactions are born of a contact, or shall I say an impact, between two persons; so I had to thrust myself in, as otherwise I could not possibly write anything really worth while. I believe, however, that what I have written is worth while not because of the part I came to play in what I can only call a drama, but because through my conflicts and strivings an aspect of his incredible self came to the fore, a self whose flowering neither the mood of our age nor the climate of our expectations could explain and, still less, foster. His efflorescence may, indeed, be looked upon as an inexplicable freak of nature—not in the sense a genius often is, but in the sense of a seer of starry verities. For I fully agree with a modern appraiser who writes after referring to prophets "from Kirkegard down to Buber" that "while men of their calibre may be expected in every century, Sri Aurobindo is an event over which Divine Providence is a thousand times more tardy"*

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* Quoted from *The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, a paper read before the London Personalist Group on June, 1950 by Morwenna Donnelly and published subsequently in *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual*, 1951.

But even the warmest tributes cause me, personally, a pang along with a thrill. For I know that the world cannot possibly have any adequate vision, at the present stage of its evolution, of the almost unbelievable greatness of one who came to us incognito and departed unrecognised by all except a handfull.

But then, as one looks back, does not one wonder if the purblindness of the multitude might not be part of the plan, being, indeed, the "cross" the lonely man of God receives everytime he gives humanity a "crown"? So why regret? One might as well regret the impotence of the senses to contemplate intersteller space or—in the words of Sri Rama-Krishna—of the "doll of salt" to plumb the ocean. The hiatus between a seer-poet and mediocrity is, if anything, greater. That is why they never once "woke up when He came and sat close to them"—to exploit a simile of Tagore's. And then did not Sri Aurobindo himself give us his own vision of humanity:

The conscious doll is pushed a thousand ways
And feels the push but not the hands that drive.[*]

So what is of importance is to know whether the "doll" is, in any given instance, pushed up (and not down) till it rises to a point where it can glimpse the "hands" behind the "drive". Until that point is reached, he says, only

A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till the hour
And belief shall not be till the work is done.[†]

In other words, whatever our rationalist judges may adjudicate to the contrary, the divine ascension shall continue since God who is not a myth has decided to grow up in our evolving consciousness till all can see what the "few" today prophesy. And when that day dawns it shall be recognised how the hour of blessed vision was made to strike centuries sooner because of the sleepless invocation of Sri Aurobindo through a life-time of superhuman *sadhana*.

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[*] Savitri, Book II Canto V. [†] Ibid, Book I, Canto III

Which does not mean that till the Bell tolls all we can do is to wait in supine helplessness. Each of us, however small or insignificant in isolation, has a part assigned to him in the cosmic scheme—a part which he must play if he has to pay his debt to God who

> "*. . . has made this tenement of flesh his own,*
> *His image in the human measure cast*
> *That to His divine nature we might rise.*"*

And the final fulfilment will then come because

> "*The Ruler there is one with all He rules.*"†

It is not contended that we never heard of this. But those who believe in the dynamic power of Truth intimately realised in life, must concede that we cannot hear too often of divine verities attested by a voice that is moved to utterance by the compelling Vision. And has there been, in our age, a Voice more vibrant than that of the lonely Herald who sang because he could not do otherwise, having seen what he had seen:

> *Even grief has joy hidden beneath its roots:*
> *For nothing is truly vain the One has made:*
> *In our defeated hearts God's strength survives*
> *And victory's star still lights our desperate road;*
> *Our death is made a passage to new worlds.*‡

At all events, those whose hearts are set aflame by his call of fire must believe what he proclaimed as a pledge of the new Sunrise and prescribed as the Way to the gleaming Goal. It is the least they can do. Whether others will follow suit, in the near future or far, we do not know.

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* Savitri, I. IV † ibid II. III ‡ ibid II. IV

Only one thing we do know, namely, that if and when they do, they will have collaborated with him and that whoever so responds may deem himself blessed in the measure of his response.

I must now say a few words about our Ashram if only to bring out the background of our life and *sadhana*.

The Ashram as we know it was born on a definite day: the 24th of November, 1926. Before that date—and ever since Sri Aurobindo came to Pondichery, in 1910—only a handful of spiritual seekers stayed with him as his disciples and looked up to him alone. In those pre-Ashram days Sri Aurobindo used to talk freely with his disciples who were dependent on him in every way and was, besides, available to some visitors if not to all. (That is why I could have the two long talks with him in 1924 which were published subsequently in my *Among the Great*.) Since 1926, however, the landscape changed as he went into seclusion and the Mother came out of hers to take personal charge of the Ashram which has been under her management all these years. From 1926 till the end of 1938 none except she could see him. Since 1938, however, he consented to have a few personal attendants and about half-a-dozen of his disciples were allowed to serve him daily. These could talk to him now and then and convey to him, when the occasion demanded, messages from outside. In recent years a few visitors were, indeed, permitted to talk to him, but *interviews* have been rarely allowed.

Now about the *darshans*.

Sri Aurobindo used to come out only four times a year:

On February 21—the Mother's birthday.
On April 24—the day she came to Pondichery for good about thirty years ago.
On August 15—Sri Aurobindo's own birthday.
On November 24—the birthday of the Ashram.

The celebrations on each of these days were crowned by Sri Aurobindo's *darshan* which means, in Sanskrit, a vision: in other words, a coming out to be seen by visitors and disciples. Those who came—from all parts of the world—had to form a queue along with us, the Ashram members. One by one, we went up to his *sanctum sanctorum* and filed past, every visitor or disciple, taking but a few seconds. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sat side by side and blessed each as he (or she) approached and stood in front of them for a little before passing on. Those who came were neither asked nor expected to comply with any formality: the whole function was marked by a signal lack of ceremony or anything even distantly resembling a ritual: no one was called upon to fulfil any condition save that of silence and not standing too long gazing at Gurudev and the Mother.

I need hardly add anything more except that in the Ashram men and women enjoy the same status and freedom subject only to a few basic rules and regulations which had to be formulated to preserve order, cleanliness and a certain amount of discipline. Those who want further information about Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and its aims are recommended to an Ashram publication entitled, *Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram;* this booklet has been sponsored by Sri Aurobindo himself.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram — D. K. R.
Pondichery — May 1951

PREFACE
(Second Edition)

Sri Auroboindo passed away all too suddenly, on December 5, 1950. I was at the time busy organising a charity concert in Varanasi to collect funds for his Pondichery Ashram.

I came back and then after a few months started writing how *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me* unexpectedly to wean me from my moorings. To be able to tell my story truthfully in all its heart-searchings and tussles, hopes and fears, vacillations and exaltations, I had to recount how I had reacted to different personalities and incidents. More than a decade had passed since then and much water has flowed down the unpredictable river of my life, resulting, naturally, in a change of perspective: many things which appeared to me important then seem unimportant and pointless now. So, in the present edition, I have been forced—somewhat against my will—to cut out much that is not germane to my theme, to wit, the delineation of the multi-mooded personality of Sri Aurobindo, the intellectual, revolutionary, dreamer, Yogi, philosopher, seer-poet and lastly—in his own words: "the Messenger of the Incommunicable".

Today, thirteen years after his passing, I have had to reappraise him, reviewing him from angles I could not have achieved at the time, when my personal grief for my irreparable loss was too great to allow me to see clearly through the mist of my tears. Now I can do so, and I am happy to be able to claim honestly that he has greatly increased in stature in my estimation. But it is not only this personal estimate that I have been at pains to present today. I want also to help others to see in him—as the world is beginning to recognise—the greatest seer-poet of our time and the holiest Herald of a New Sunrise of the Spirit.

This being my chief reason for republishing these reminiscences about my peerless Master and Friend, I have thought fit to add some new letters and incidents as well as to expunge a few redundant chapters so that our eyes may be focussed *on him and him alone*. So, I trust that those whom I have left out in the present edition will not misunderstand my deletion. I have never been one to forget a debt which I hope to be able to prove in the near future when I propose to write about what I owe to them individually in a haven where I passed some of my happiest years, thanks to their loving kindness, sympathy and cooperation.

One last word: I wanted to write more about Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, *Savitri** which, I am persuaded is going to be acclaimed in the near future as the greatest epic after the Mahabharat and Ramayan.† But as I propose to write a book on the *Vision of Savitri*, I have confined myself to telling more about his greatness than I could thirteen years ago.

Hari Krishna Mandir
Poona-5

D. K. Roy
March 1963

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* Professor Raymond F Piper of Syracuse University has written: "The cosmic poem Savitri, in 23813 lines of exquisite English blank verse is probably the greatest epic in any language" (INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO—George Allen and Unwin p. 125).

† Krishnaprem wrote to me in 1948 after reading Savitri: "Such poetry can only be written either in the early days before the rise to power of self-conscious mind or, when that particular cycle has run its course and life establishes itself once more in the unity beyond, this time with all the added range and power that has been gained during the reign of mind. It is an omen of the utmost significance and hope that in these years of darkness and despair such a poem as Savitri should have appeared. Let us salute the dawn."

INVOCATION

TO

SRI AUROBINDO

Knowing thee once, do we not know the Truth,
However fragmentary? For though we may
Still fail to glimpse thy New Dawn which can soothe
Our famished eyes with His unsullied Day,

Yet once thou makst our halflit consciousness
Reverberate thy fire-thrilled melody,
Will not its rapture lead us to His Grace,
Resolving our discord with thy harmony?

When in the labyrinthine thrall of Fate
We grope for a Ray, thy marvel blessing alone
Heals dusk with thy moon-song inviolate
Our dark-enamoured moods, alas, disown!

Outsoaring our science-fostered strife and din
Thou wingst the blue—no dragons make thee quail.
Thou hast attained what only the elect win:
Lone zenith-vision no clouds can countervail.

For thou hast conquered, at the journey's end,
The Sun-elixir to quell the hordes of Night.
Who once have seen thy Face have known, O Friend:
'Tis not a myth that Love is one with Light.

D. K. R.

Dilip,

Here is a poem I wrote for you last night. I am sending you now only eight lines:

All eye has seen and all the ear has heard
Is a pale illusion by some greater voice
And mightier vision; no sweet sound or word,
No passion of hues that make the heart rejoice
Can equal these diviner ecstasies.

A mind beyond our mind has sole the ken
Of those yet unimagined harmonies,
The fate and privilege of unborn men.

Sri Aurobindo · March, 1944

(This poem he expanded afterwords into a sonnet which was published posthumously in his LAST POEMS, in 1952, p. 45).

Extract from a letter to me which came to be quoted in many a book after his passing (28.12.1934):

> *"I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and its advent is, in the very nature of things, inevitable. The question is as to the when and the how. That is also decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces."*

FOREWORD

Dilip—I shall call him Dilip, as Dilip Kumar Roy sounds too pompous for so ethereal and lovable a spirit—Dilip has evolved an 'art' of biography all his own. Perhaps the word 'evolved' is somewhat inappropriate here: Dilip hasn't pursued laborious technological processes to arrive at his 'art'; it has just come to him or he has come by it as a matter of course—an edict of destiny, if you will, but no frowns, no tears, no nerve-racking researches. His two earlier works—*Among the Great* and *The Subhash I Knew*—have made us familiar with the contours of this 'art'—an art so artless that it resembles the sinuous movements of a mountain-stream rather than the rigid outlines of a massive structure, a style so unlaboured that it seems to write itself out, a style marked by the naturalness and insinuating cadences of the living voice rather than the organised rhythms of a conscious artist. He writes only of people whom he has seen and known and verily grappled to his heart. How few biographers have subjected themselves to this discipline of resolved limitations! As Dilip writes of people he has known intimately, not only does he write, as a rule, from first-hand knowledge, he is also inevitably driven to project himself into the narratives. And so it comes about that when Dilip writes a biography, it turns out to be somewhat of an autobiography as well. There is, indeed, a fascinating muddling of categories of biography and autobiography, though the final result is not a muddle but the creation of a work pulsing with light and life, the convincing evocation of a person, a power, an environment and a point of view.

Dilip's genius for friendship, discipleship, love is but one of his cardinal qualifications for essaying biographies. Friendship could be allied with reticence and taciturnity—a private affair, pure and holy, not open to discussion, nor amenable to public exibition. But no one law is valid for all.' Boswell loved Johnson "on this side idolatry"; yet he was, in a manner of speaking, a 'spy'—taking notes, making calculations, conducting Sherlock-Holmesian enquiries, prodding his hero at well-regulated intervals and photographing his reactions. In short, the lover has his own "axes to grind", though these have now been acclaimed worthy axes, burnished to an unfading golden hue. In like manner, Dilip too has not only a genius for friendship but also a genius for drawing his friends out. A delightful conversationalist, he is not unwilling to assume the pose of a froward child or of a fierce disputant, just to provoke the other person into a characteristic outburst, or a memorable statement, or a sudden jet of argument or laughter. He has sought numerous interviews and he has preserved a glittering record of them; even casual conversations have gone into his diaries to be drawn upon at need. And he has been a tireless correspondent. Dilip writes to A, who replies in due course; Dilip now writes to B enclosing A's reply: B's reply arrives at last; promptly Dilip Writes to C attaching copies of A's and B's replies and writes to A once again asking him what he thinks of B's remarks . . . already I am getting lost in the labyrinth, but not so Dilip, he holds the clues in firm grasp! With perfect candour he explains his method:

"It was often like this that it happened: sometimes a brother-disciple would write something to me whereupon Sri Aurobindo would comment. I would then convey to Krishnaprem how things stood, and then he, as often as not, would come forward with his reactions to the message of Gurudev, upon which Gurudev would have something more to say by way of clarification, almost like a billiard-ball bounding and rebounding again and again."

And the process would, result in "far-reaching repercussions", achieving endless extension in space and time! One can only admire Dilip's adroitness which at once generates and controls the oceanic mass of correspondence—wave upon wave, over-riding, interlocking, for ever changing and for ever the same! A genius for friendship.

love, adoration and imaginative sympathy, coupled with a genius for conversation and correspondence: these native gifts Dilip has capitalised with the result that he is a biographer out of the ordinary, a biographer *sui generis*.

Sri Aurobindo was one of the five "great" men covered by Dilip in his *Among the Great;* he is frequently referred to or quoted in *The Subhash I Knew;* and whatever the theme, even when he is only writing a novel or a drama on Sri Chaitanya or a poem on Prahlad, Sri Aurobindo also is the theme—for Sri Aurobindo is the Ground, the Air, the interpenetrating Ether in Dilip's world. In his admirable new book, however—challengingly entitled *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*—there is no Maya-screen between him and his alchemist-friend, Gurudev and all-in-all. Yet, although Sri Aurobindo is the confessed theme of Dilip's new book, his longest and greatest, it would be wrong to call it simply a biography of the Master. The title itself is audaciously disarming, *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me!* The 'inversion' is masterly. Dilip didn't go to Sri Aurobindo: Sri Aurobindo came to Dilip! Hasn't Sri Aurobindo himself declared that "he who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite!" Also as Sri Aurobindo once confided to Dilip:

"Even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had that relation which declares itself constantly through many lives. . . . It is a feeling which is never mistaken and gives the impression of one not only close to one but a part of one's existence."

Does it mean that *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me* is really Dilip's camouflaged autobiography? "This is not an autobiography," Dilip emphatically asserts. On the other hand there is a whole chapter entitled 'Avowedly Personal', and even otherwise we catch Dilip saying "I will have to pause here and become, once more a little autobiographical." The book, then, is autobiographical without being an autobiography, and its principal merit is that the more we learn about Dilip the nearer we get to Sri

Aurobindo. Nay, more: Dilip has projected into the main canvas other luminous figures as well, they too take us only closer to Sri Aurobindo. Dilip's way of writing can be tantalising, but it is also fascinating. He can combine the shrewdness of a diplomat with the irresponsibility of a spoilt child. But why complain? And, after all, what is there to complain about? Dilip's methods are his own: but he ends by overwhelming the reader, and leaves him with a sense of profound fulfilment.

With a rich multifoilate background, with influential friends the world over, having already made his mark in music and trailing clouds of glorious promise in other fields, Dilip nevertheless felt a gnawing discomfort in his heart and so visited Pondichery and saw Sri Aurobindo in 1924. He returned in 1928 and joined the Ashram—and has been a *sadhaka* ever since. When Dilip took the decisive step and joined the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo had gone into complete seclusion, and hence letters were the only formal channel of communication between the Master and the disciples. For years Sri Aurobindo spent whole nights answering his correspondents. And none of his correspondents was so demanding, so indefatigable, so irresistible, as Dilip. Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga comprehended all life and sought to transform it; hence the letters that passed between him and Dilip were also all-inclusive in subject matter while the tone and the style too changes significantly even as the subject changed. There was, of course, the dominant preoccupation with the Supramental Idea. What exactly was the Supramental? Did it really mean business? When and how would it set about the job of transforming earth-nature into supernature? There were Sri Aurobindo's published works, no doubt, where these and allied questions were exhaustively answered. Yet Dilip asked and asked, raised doubts and pronounced hypotheses, passed on titbits and *obiter dicta* and wouldn't be denied an answer. "I often conveyed to Gurudev such titbits to draw him out if I could", Dilip confesses, and adds: "as, I generally succeeded, I grew bolder. . . .” Again: “Month after weary month I challenged him (Sri Aurobindo) to prove his thesis which I knew in my heart of hearts to be true and yet, curiously, I insisted on flinging a deeper defiance every time he leaned down to accord me a kindlier handclasp”. And again: “Thus I went on blowing my bubble of sorrow, inveigled by its phantom iridescence.” But Sri Aurobindo patiently exposed Dilip’s “unconscious paralogisms as well as wilful sophism”, and drew nearer and still nearer to his heart’s core. If necessary, he was prepared to play the game even as Dilip himself played it—to go one better, in fact, in flashfulness. Dilip once tried the telegraphic style:

“O Guru, I send you a Bengali poem of mine entitled *Akuti* which I translated last night into English. Can you revise it? Is it good? Mediocre? Worthless? Frank opinion, please! But what about Raihana’s letter? Won’t return? You keep mum. What’s up? Bridge-building? Supramental? Wool-gathering?”

Sri Aurobindo’s answer was like “an echo to the song”:

“I shall see if I can get a few minutes for revising your English translation. But you seemed to have progressed greatly in your English verse. How so quickly? Yogic force? Internal combustion? The subliminal self? Raihana’s letter and drawing which have unaccountably turned up again with me. Poltergeist? Your inadvertence? Mine?”

This extraordinary freedom which Dilip enjoyed in his relations with the Master has proved very fruitful indeed, for to it we owe the hundreds of letters which Sri Aurobindo wrote to his disciple. Was it wrong of Dilip to have occasionally almost ‘gone for’ Sri Aurobindo, to have sc often provoked him and as often misunderstood him? But there is another side to the shield, as Dilip himsel realises. “I console myself today”, writes Dilip, “tha even my wrongest moods did serve a two-fold purpose first objectively, because they brought into relief his (Sr Aurobindo’s) great understanding of and compassion fo human nature.... and then, subjectively, because it can hardly be gain-said that had I been by nature less intractable than I was, I might indeed, have been richer today in Yogic experience, but should I not have been poorer in my intimate knowledge of that human side of him which is so infinitely precious to me?" The same Dilip who brings out his Guru's humour and humanity is fully aware also of the Master's global intelligence, the ambrosial quality of his mantric poetry, and the potencies of his earth-transforming Yoga. Dilip speaks about these, but others too have spoken about them; but only Dilip can reveal to us the less austere, the more human sides of Sri Aurobindo's power and personality. In his pages Sri Aurobindo remains a Colossus, a veritable Himalayas of Wisdom and Power, but all is toned up with the embracing fluidity of love, and the Master who is "august and dire" is seen from the human end, to be also a "sweet fulfiller of desire."

Dilip writes in the course of the book that he has "no wish to write a manual of Yoga." If we wish to learn about Supramental Yoga, there are the Master's own works. Dilip's book is about Yogins more than about their Yoga—though, of course, Yoga comes breaking in. "The Making of Yogis' might, perhaps, have been a subtitle of the book. We watch the evolution of a Dilip, a Chadwick, a Nixon from agonised and purblind mortals into self-poised and more and more purposively and creatively active sadhakas. The Master is, of course in a different category: for it would be wide off the mark to talk of *his* 'evolution'—with him there has been 'a manifestation of a growing Divine consciousness', but not something human, laboriously scaling higher regions. His sojourn, his descending into clay, has been necessary to "bring the heavens down": and having assumed a human nvelope, he has partaken of human joys and trials, without denying its quintessential nature. The effect of Dilip's book is to emphasize the humanity of the Master and also he growth in consciousness of his disciples. By apparently human ways the disciples are helped to transcend their humanity and achieve progress in their Yoga.

The book is of unusual interest to students of poetry and Yoga as references to poetry and poets are scattered all over. Sri Aurobindo was both poet and critic of poetry, and he was also the prophet of future poetry and, in very considerable measure, fulfiller of his own prophecy. Dilip does ample justice to all these facets, and the illustrative quotations and his own appreciative comments enrich further a volume whose value even otherwise must be priceless.

In conclusion, whatever else is read, Dilip's *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* must also be read. Dilip was to Sri Aurobindo as St. John was in the bosom of Christ; and *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* is the Aurobindonian Gospel according to Dilip—St. John. It is, accordingly, and indispensable book to all admirers of Sri Aurobindo; all students of Yoga; all lovers of poetry; and all serious practitioners of the creative art of Life.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar
Andhra University
WALTAIR

CHAPTER I

APOLOGIA

I must start with a curious apology, that I do not feel called upon to apologise for what I venture to undertake, to wit, to describe not so much how my Gurudev, Sri Aurobindo impinged on me, as how I reacted to him. For, when all is said, one can scarcely hope to delineate the beauty of a great personality in abstract terms with purple epithets. One can—at least that is how I have always looked upon all who are truly great—only portray one's own reactions to them, and very imperfectly at that. I would go further and submit that the greater a personality, the more he must elude us. Sri Rabindranath Tagore once told me that we understand more than we think we do. To me the statement never seemed cryptic. For whenever, in my life's gropings, I have met a truly great soul, the impression left on me has grown in height and depth with time and I have felt that I have profited by him more than I was able to assess.

I can only speak of what I know, and since I am persuaded that what I do not even surmise as self-knowledge is yet an important part of myself, I am entitled to express it even at the risk of sounding somewhat unintelligible to many. Also I would warn my readers, even when I humbly ask them to lend me a sympathetic ear—without which none can truly hear what another has to say—that I will have, on occasions, to make such mystic statements while reminiscing about one who came into my life like a storm at once liberating and imperious; whom I courted and yet wanted to disown; whom on numerous occasions I resisted and yet could not help clinging to; acclaimed and yet criticised with all my irreverent impetuosity; whom I accused bitterly of being aloof, although even his remoteness gave me boons of intimacy and vision which no physical proximity with my dearest friends and comrades have ever been able to rival. Also, I would ask them, while they appraise my statements, to do me but the bare justice of believing in my sincerity; that is, to accept it when I say that I will not be consciously untruthful or theatrical when portraying my reactions to one whom I wanted to woo and yet felt so frantically impelled to desert that I had the temerity to write to him, again and again, that I had decided to end what seemed to me, in such turbid moments, a futile relationship and that what I found hardest to bear was that nobody must seek a private interview with him except when he himself deemed it necessary. In my spiritual crises I was, indeed, allowed to speak—even sing—to him, but still sometimes I went the length of apprising him, childishly, that I was going to leave him for good without any regret, when every beat of my heart rebuked me for wanting to stifle its breath. Reason never threw any light on this enigma although I hunted after a rational clue to the mystery as dispassionately as I could. I can only say now, when the supreme giver I cavilled at so often is no more, that I regard nothing that I count as an asset in my personality as not a gift, partial or entire, of his compassion—a compassion beside which the deepest human tenderness I have known pales into a glimmer. And yet I may well speak of him, from concrete indubitable experience, as being almost on a par with "the Unseen Beloved, the Lover whom we think not of" who, even in this drab world does, sometimes, "seize on us for his own whether at first we will or no. He may even come to us at first as an enemy with the wrath of love, and our earliest relations with him may be those of battle and struggle."*

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* Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Yoga, p. 690.

CHAPTER II

THE PILGRIMAGE

As I look back, after having been havened at his feet for well over two decades, I find it still difficult to decide what it is that drew a man of my temperament to one whose ways were so utterly different. Was it his genius? His "face radiant with an inner light", as Rabindranath had so aptly described? Or, was it the magnetism of a mystic aureole that shone round him, an overwhelming sublimity that conquered one even when it baffled definition? Or, was it the ocean of peace he spoke of so often, a vastness which cradled him or because his "life" had become "a throb of His eternity" as he put it in his beautiful poem, *Bliss of Identity*? He impinged on my consciousness at different times in different ways, so I cannot claim to say definitely why I found him so irresistible even when his aloof seclusion I have never been able to get reconciled to. I suppose a truly great personality not only attracts diverse types but also fascinates in entirely different ways on different occasions. Whatever it was, I confess that I cannot answer such extremely pertinent questions with any accent of certitude. A time was when I might have—when, that is, I was an idolator of Reason, the Infallible. But not now—when my proud faith in the human intellect as the final judge of Truth with a capital T has been completely sapped after years of hopeless struggles with one who was so formidably equipped against "intellectual rationalism" as I was wont to put it once upon a time. The result is that, in the end, I feel that the more one comes to know a mystic *par excellence* like him the less is one likely to be able to appraise him with the intellect.

Did I ever truly know why I had not only come to him as bee to rose, but clung to him with all the tentacles of my attachments even when I chafed and fumed, telling myself that the rose no longer had any honey to boast. Many a time have I assured myself in my self-willed revolt that a seclusion like his was an anachronism in our age because nobody could go on living in an ivory tower of self-centred contemplation in the twentieth century and yet retain his power to influence the hot passions and fratricidal strifes of today. The age is past, I told myself over and over again, when one saw nothing wrong at all about blind acceptance of ancient tenets which the credulous so often equate with faith and the faithful with loyalty.

And yet here am I, an ultra-modern to the core, writing about one to whose call I had responded with all my heart! Could this have come to pass if I had been what I have all along believed myself to be, to wit, an intellectual and an artist and I do not know what else, but certainly not a mystic or a Yogi by nature or persuasion, as I so often told him categorically? I will try to answer this self-imposed question in my own way, albeit incidentally. For my central theme is going to be his greatness of love and understanding which made him come to me as he did.

CHAPTER III

REORIENTATION

It was Tagore who first told me that even as a child he had been imbibing things which had to lie for a long time in his subconsciousness as seeds before they could come to full flowering. He told me, as I have recorded elsewhere, that some of the best things in life work in us like a leaven, an invisible influence, as, for example, the inspiration of woman in her totality.. "Woman's function in life", he said, "is not really confined to the physical plane: she is indispensable to man's mental creation as man is to her physical. It is only because on the mental plane she works from behind the screen that we do not visualise her contribution. But that is only because we are unimaginative."*

I well remember how, in the first flush of my youth, this idea of the subconscious storing up all our forgotten impressions came to us from the West and just swept us off our feet and made us feel so proud of our new-found knowledge that we heightened it, promptly enough, by the epithet scientific, alas, little suspecting that the knowledge that is popularly called scientific was not going to prove as incontrovertible as its votaries claimed two centuries ago. And it was Sri Aurobindo who first told me that the theory of the subconscious was no bran-new idea of the West but was known almost as the A.B.C. of the hoary Yogic lore of India. I can still recall how I was startled when he assured me that the modern penchant of the Western psycho-analysts and psychiatrists for dissecting and explaining everything through the scalpel and microscope of the subconscious, however commendable as a first attempt of psychological research of the deeper kind in the West, could not possibly go far until, that is, it began to take stock of the Yogic way of observing ourselves and change its *modus operandi*. "I find it difficult", he wrote to me, "to take Jung and the psycho-analysts at all seriously when they try to examine spiritual experience by the flicker of their torch-lights—though perhaps one ought to, for half-knowledge is a powerful thing and can be a great obstacle to the coming in front of the true Truth. No doubt, they are very remarkable men in their own field; but this new psychology looks to me very much like children learning some summary and not very adequate alphabet, exulting in putting their a-b-c-d of the subconscient and the mysterious underground super-ego together and imagining that their first book of obscure beginnings (c-a-t=cat. t-r-e-e=tree) is the very heart of the real knowledge. They look from down up and explain the higher lights by the lower obscurities; but the foundation of these things is above and not below: *upari budhna esham*. The Superconscient, not the subconscient, is the true foundation of things. The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above. The self-chosen field of these psychologists is, besides, poor, dark and limited; you must know the whole before you can know the part, *and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the province of the greater psychology awaiting its hour before which these poor gropings will disappear and come to nothing.*" In another letter he wrote to me in reply to a question of mine about Eddington's '*Science and the Unseen World*': "*The part about the changed attitude of modern science to its own field of discovery is interesting. The latter part about religious experience I find very feeble; it gives me the impression of a hen scratching the surface of the earth to find a scrap or two of food—nothing deeper.*"

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* *Among the Great*, p. 177.

I am enlarging on this stray view of his with a definite motive: I must remind my readers that I have set out to portray, among other things, such of my reactions to my Master as are likely to prove profitable to those who have a spiritual opening and yet cannot accept the loud lead given by vociferous Gurus. I appreciate their difficulty which is genuine enough as I myself used to fling at my Guru time and again when I argued animatedly against *Guruvada* in his own citadel. Many people are today terrified at the prospect of deifying the Guru because having contacted some fake Gurus in India, they dread, if not abhor, the idea of being dictated to or halted by arbitrary 'Thou-shalt-nots' of an obsolete authoritarianism.

That is, as I wrote to him once, the main reason why the *Zeitgeist* of today is definitely ranged against the traditional type of Guruvada—because it is an intransigent imposition from above, not a willing acceptance from below. He wrote back that he knew very well the "spirit of the age" and had even subscribed to it, once upon a time. But to live was to change as he used to say often to his brother, Barindra Kumar, the famous revolutionary, who told me that Sri Aurobindo was wont to say, whenever reminded of a view of his in the past: "*Don't quote me against myself, Barin*!" And Barinda showed me a letter of his (dated April, 1920) in which he wrote: "*I do not wish to be a Guru myself. If I am able to awaken the sleeping Divine in but a few I shall be content.*" To me he wrote in a letter (16.1.36) in a light-hearted mood: "In spiritual things the religionists do not matter, for their action, naturally, is to make a dry formula and dry shell of everything, not Grace alone. Even 'Awake, arise' leads to the swelled head or the formula which can't be avoided when Mr. Everyman deals with things divine. I had the same kind of violent objection to Gurugiri but you see I was obliged by the irony of things—or, rather, by the inexorable truth behind them—to become a Guru and preach Guruvad. Such is Fate!" But to return to my theme: how *my* fate compelled me to capitulate to Guruvad under protest.

When I first arrived at the Ashram, in 1928, I was given to understand by some neophytes—there were about eighty of us in those days—that one must never even dream of questioning any law laid down by the Guru. This made me, indeed, very unhappy till I began to have regular weekly conversations with the Mother. I found her so tolerant that one day I asked her, at a venture, why she who was so understanding wanted us to fear her and Sri Aurobindo. "Fear!" she exclaimed in surprise. "What an idea! We only want you to have the attitude of simple trust as a child has vis-a-vis its parents."

It was only then that I decided to give my heart's adhesion to the Ashram and the ideology it stood for. My flaws of character are doubtless legion, as my innumerable detractors will agree in full-throated unison, but I doubt whether even the bitterest of them would adjudge me a timid man. And so, because I found the very idea of fearing the Guru intolerable, whenever any disciple of the Ashram spoke too solemnly so as to put God's (or the Guru's) fear into my soul it was only iron that entered. Unfortunately for me, I found out that the idea of obeying the Guru from fear was not half as repugnant to others as it was to me. Many is the time that I was hushed the moment I breathed a question as to why the Guru had laid down such and such laws, or issued certain general injunctions in the Ashram. This, after the initial shock, made me, indeed, go on fretting so much, day after brooding day, that, unable to bear it eventually, one day I asked the Mother who was in charge of our Ashram. She was very kind and explained to me at once, the gist of which was that nowhere in the world could an institution carry on without some laws laid down or codes formulated for general guidance. "But," she added instantly, "I do mean it when I say that I would have *no* rules at all if the Ashram could be run without them. Also I am wide-awake and hold that all rules should come from within. So I never sanction more codes than are absolutely necessary."

About Gurudev this was even more demonstrably true as I went on discovering day after refreshing day. In the famous letter to his brother (already referred to) he wrote:

"I am fully persuaded that the origin of the weakness of India is neither political servitude nor material poverty, still less the dearth of spirituality: we have degenerated because of the waning of our capacity to think and concentrate. Except for a few solitary giants everywhere you meet the average man who does not want to think nor can, who has no strength. The result: ignorance reigns today in this our land of knowledge!"

As this remained his opinion to the end, I shed gradually my malaise till, finally, I came to be reconciled to the cloistered limitations of our Ashram. And then, with time, I learned to turn to him more and more to be soothed whenever I felt out of sympathy with those I met. This forced me again to look to him for guidance, the more so as he willingly came down to my level, I repeat, to show me the way out in every *impasse*. . . . And lastly, the more he encouraged me to argue with him freely, the less ill-at-ease I felt, no matter what some others told me about the wisdom of docility, because I came to be persuaded more and more that so far as I was concerned he was beyond taking amiss the liberties I took with him. Thereafter, as my happy confidence in him deepened, thanks to his unfailing tolerance, I ventured further afield and began taking exception to this and that till I caught myself sometimes even criticising him in the end. This made many people aghast: e.g. my dear friend and mentor Sri Krishnaprem from Almora took me once to task for it. "You write that you have sometimes 'gone for Sri Aurobindo!' You must not. *Of course* he will not mind. He sees the jewel in the lotus and can smile at your criticism but *you* mustn't do it. Even in thought you mustn't criticise him. It all springs from the desire to have things one's own way. He is your Guru and, in the first place, it is sheer ingratitude to criticise one who has shown you the light and, in the second, the Guru is inseparable from Krishna. He is the one who has shown you the Light and your whole life can be no repayment for such a gift. Even if you were to spend the rest of your life with no further 'experience' at all, you would be utterly wrong if you refused to give yourself to him. As far as I know he does not ask for blind obedience from his disciples (at least so I gather from your letter) but one must never criticise even when one can't follow. If one could understand everything one's Guru said, then there would be hardly any need for a Guru at all."

I cannot honestly deny that here he was right. But can I with equal honesty own that I am really repentant for having again and again committed the misdemeanour he so strongly reprimanded? I will go further and presume to ask my own heart whether I have not had a deeper vision of Gurudev's greatness through having been led by him, almost unawares, to spar with him as one would with an equal? And then could it have been at all possible for such as we to have dared him thus to duels had he not himself, in his infinite indulgence, consented to the thrust and parry with such inept tyros? Apropos, I am reminded of a letter which a colleague of mine wrote to him once in a light vein:

"But what disciples are we of what a Master!" he wrote in one of his beautiful moods. "I do wish you had chosen some with a better native stuff, like Krishnaprem, for instance!"

His rejoinder was characteristic:

"As to the disciples, I agree. But would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path? —that is another question." But the crux of the difficulty as he himself saw it, was expressed rather trenchantly in the very next, the third, query: "And if they (these might-have-been disciples with the better stuff) were put to the test, would not the common humanity reveal itself? That is still another question."

I know to my cost—and I speak here as a mouthpiece for the rest—how disconcertingly and obstinately common, even banal, this stuff turns out to be when probed deep enough by the revealing ray which comes down in answer to the agonised prayer, in each of us, of the "bleeding piece of earth".

But what I mean by this cannot be properly explained before a picture of the Ashram life—as it evolved before me, day by day, from 1928 till today—is achieved. It will not be an easy task: nevertheless it must be attempted at this stage.

CHAPTER IV

THE ASHRAM: THE CALL

BEFORE I launch into the difficult task of setting down my various reactions to the Ashram-life that opened before me in 1928, I must portray my dread of such a life prior to my being plunged into it by a mysterious force which was at once too tangible to be dismissed as an airy nothing and too indefinable to be grappled with. For this it is necessary to go back a little even at the risk of becoming frankly autobiographical.

I was born in one of the most aristocratic Brahmin families of Bengal. My father's mother, I have been told, traced a direct and verifiable descent from the saintly Adwaita Goswami, one of Sri Chaitanya's intimates. My father's father, Diwan Kartikeya Chandra Roy, was a Prime Minister of one of the noblest and most ancient States of Bengal. Apart from the position he enjoyed, his honesty and strength of character were legendary: for his honesty the Prince once offered him a munificent reward which he declined because, he said, he could not possibly accept a reward for having done his bare duty. He was, besides, a bold free-thinker and wrote an autobiography which shocked many when it saw the light, nearly a century ago, because therein he not only frankly testified to his apostasy by saying that he could not believe in a good Sentinel watching over this incorrigible universe, but also vented openly his admiration of the *mleccha* (unclean) English and his partiality for their culture *in toto*.

My father, Dwijendralal Roy, who took after my grandfather, was also a remarkable personality and a brilliant scholar. He went to England on a State scholarship, returned with a diploma from Cirencester, was appointed a Deputy Magistrate under the British whose overlordship he cordially hated and ridiculed in his historical dramas which earned him the title of the greatest dramatist of modern India. I could willingly go on writing about his versatile genius and literary attainments but since that would be going beyond the purview of my undertaking, I must content myself with mentioning only such of his qualities as bear upon my theme.

My grandfather's robust uprightness and agnosticism had made, in the 'eighties, an indelible impression on his precocious son's avid, adolescent mind. His stay in England only deepened this trend he had imbibed from his idol. No wonder he came back from England an avowed atheist, a fiery free-thinker and an impatient iconoclast rolled into one. As, however, he was not a Prime Minister, he could be, and promptly was, excommunicated by his relations. Nothing daunted, the rebel wrote a scathing satire on Hindu orthodoxy and practically burned his boats by marrying my mother, the eldest daughter of a widow who had married a second time! Having now little more to lose and even less to fear, he went on squibbing our Hindu religiosity and formalism in his comic songs and satirical poems which won him quick and lasting fame. I was at the time still in my teens.

Being congenitally fond of laughter, I went on laughing with him when he made bold to include even the Gita as a target for his pasquinades. Of course he had nothing against the Gita itself, but he simply could not help pillorying those who lived an unclean life and yet made a fetish of the Gita in season and out. This I found very enjoyable and I remember how I used to sing merrily with him as the irreverent rollicked in laughter: (I give here a translation of only eight lines from his celebrated lampoon):

> *If I humbug the world to the top of my bent*
> *Steal, swindle, blaspheme or perjure,*
> *'Twill all be absolved by dint of the Gita.*
> *All ills of the flesh she can cure.*
> *There can be no scriptures, O friend, like the Gita,*
> *Let's live with her name on our lips!*
> *Glory to thee, O Gita, my angel,*
> *Whose magic nought else can eclipse.*

But even when I did enjoy such irresistible songs I could not go all the way with him in decrying religious ardour, having already at thirteen come under the influence of two direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa: Swami Brahmananda, the founder of Ramakrishna Mission, and "Sri M" the famous chronicler of the great Messiah. I cannot here possibly enlarge any more on my father's great though somewhat enigmatic personality—since he composed some of the greatest hymns in the Bengali language (to Krishna, Shiva, Kali, Ganga, Sri Chaitanya, etc.) which he sang often with tears of ecstasy in his eyes. But one thing I must make clear at this stage—to obviate misunderstanding.

In my summary description of my two immediate forbears, I may have unwittingly encouraged my readers to form a somewhat wrong notion about the part the deeper spiritual forces had played in moulding their lives. From what I have written, those who do not know well the best Indian minds may think that there is, in the last analysis, hardly any basic difference between these and those others who have been successfully westernised and completely insulated from India's ancient spiritual influences by the modern European outlook on life, as has happened—to give a typical contemporary example—with Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. In other words, they may conclude, misled by our modern slogans, that the best minds among us may, like him, achieve a lasting harmony only under the tutelage of the West. Such a view would be not only utterly unsound but demonstrably false. The best Indian minds, however effectually inseminated by the doctrines of Western materialism, can never find any true sustenance at the fount of visionless agnosticism and soulless science.

At the same time there is much debris we have to clear before we can reach the pure fount of spiritual wisdom we thirst for. My father felt this deeply no less than my grandfather had, in his day. Nevertheless they did not, in the last resort, throw away the baby along with the bath water. That was the reason why my father had nothing but approval for my adoration of Sri Ramakrishna even when he satirized the degenerate ritualism of superstitious Hindus. The point I want to make is that, when all is said and done, there is something in the submerged depths of the authentic Indian nature which cannot open permanently to any gospel other than that of the spirit no matter how high the stakes are.

Apropos, I am reminded of a striking remark of Lowes Dickinson, the famous rationalist who, after touring the Far East, wrote that neither Japan nor China was incomprehensible to the Western mind: it was only in India that he had been held up as before something utterly alien, even terrifying, to the Occident! And that is precisely why Pundit Jawaharlal finds Hindu culture so foreign, even bizarre, and fails to understand the diverse ways in which its religious spirit has helped humanity, a failure which prompted Sri Aurobindo to write to me (commenting on a few excerpts I had sent him from Punditji's views on religion):

"I do not take the same view of the Hindu religion as Jawaharlal. Religion is indeed always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with his endeavours that come in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral-temple half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail but always fantastic with a significance—crumbling and badly outworn in places, but a cathedral-temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and Its real Presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit. . . .

"As for the other question—about the truth behind Hinduism—I can only say what to my view is the truth behind Hinduism, a truth contained in the very nature (not superficially seen of course) of human existence, something which is not the monopoly of Hinduism but of which Hinduism *is* the noblest expression."

Lowes Dickinson and Pundit Nehru never felt this because neither could command "the right spirit". The reasons for this, however, would take me beyond the scope of my book. So to resume.

Unlike the typical positivist mind just referred to, I felt that I had a congenital streak of the mystic which Dickinson dubs incomprehensible and Punditji medieval. So I was not only willing but eager to play for higher stakes—"to live dangerously" as Nietzsche has put it. But as days passed, I could neither perceive the call nor find a way to give a practical shape to my ideal. I was all but ready to "take the plunge" but where was the calling, haunting deep? And what is more, might not one hope to chance even upon a raft, if not a boat, when one felt helpless against the army of waves? That was the question I had to find an answer to once and for all.

An Ashram, a spiritual centre, a nucleaus of aspirants? But being a born individualist, with love of freedom bred in my bones, I was scared at the prospect of having to live in a colony, in comparative seclusion under conditions which might prove more stringent than I could bear. Suppose I did not agree with the *sadhakas?* Suppose my Guru asked me to abide by rules I found impossible? Suppose I found it cramping—the monotony of the same task-round repeated day after day, year in and year out? All sorts of speculations seethed in my brain like irrepressible bubbles till, finally, I decided that we, moderns, could not possibly find spiritual fulfilment through such a cheap escapist device, which, besides, had been tried in antiquity and found wanting.

And yet where and how else could one translate in daily life one's ideal of one-pointed *sadhana* (self-discipline), so indispensable to one who is athirst for the all-transfiguring spiritual experience? The world, as I saw it, if not actually hostile, was certainly indifferent to all spiritual endeavour which could only attain fruition after an arduous effort at self-purification under the wise and beneficent guidance of a Godlike Master. But the strange thing was that while I yearned for the guidance I also dreaded the conditions under which alone it could become fruitful in the actual field of action, Yoga. I clearly saw that this would never do, and yet—the prospect of living cabined and cribbed, jostling against the same people day after day and taking orders from one I would not be able to approach, even to talk to—nay, I shuddered at the very thought!

But I had made one mistake, and a very serious mistake at that, as I came to realise later. This I must try to explain at some length if only to be intelligible.

I had come to realise, by and by, that in the present world at least, one could not possibly live like the mendicant of old, living on alms and trusting to the Unseen Providence to help keep our body and soul together, simply "giving all one had to the poor" and following a *phantom*, as my realist reason called it derisively. One must have an organisation or asylum of some sort where one might reasonably hope to be able to live in comparative security in some sort of harmony with one's environment.

Nevertheless I felt deep misgivings about my congenital inability, first, to run in harness with a motley number whose susceptibilities were unlikely to leave mine alone; and, secondly, to find a living inspiration under the aegis of a Guru who was even more inaccessible than a Caliph in his garden retreat. This is no overstatement. For in those days Sri Aurobindo used to live behind a deep purdah. Nobody but the Mother had access to his ivory tower. And for any message from him we had to look up to her even as the proverbial *chatak* (bird) looks up to the sky for its message of rain in drought. It was from her mouth alone that sometimes dropped a few words of what our cloistered master had said about so and so or on sudden upheavels here and there. (If was only after 1930 that his correspondence began to assume the formidable proportions it did till, in the end, he had to write numerous letters in answer to ours from 9. P.M. till the small hours of the morning, and this went on night after night for eight consecutive years. He lightly referred to it in one of his letters to me as "my feats of correspondence"—as they certainly were!)

But as I grew more and more conscious of my incapacity (or shall I say ineligibility) for his or any other Master's Yoga, I found less and less comfort within the four walls of my refuge "far from the madding crowd". How could I possibly shape to strength in an atmosphere so alien to my temperament with no signs of changing, I asked myself again and again. When, at last, my mental anguish became unbearable, I wrote to Gurudev that I found my troubles as endless as they were inexplicable. It was then that help came in answer to the call of my helplessness: Gurudev wrote to me in a letter (dated 25.6.1932) which made me see daylight. The gist of it was that in Yoga one had to grow progressively conscious of the world and its unpalatable realities, as he put it. "For," he explained, '*Knowledge when it goes to the root of our troubles has in itself a marvellous healing power as it were. As soon as you touch the quick of the trouble, as soon as you—diving down and down—get at what really ails you, the pain disappears as though by a miracle. Unflinching courage to reach the Knowledge is therefore of the very essence of Yoga. No lasting superstructure can* *be erected except on a solid basis of true Knowledge. The feet must be sure of its ground before the head can hope to kiss the skies.*"

This letter revived my drooping spirits, acting like a veritable antidote to the pain that had accrued to me when it was borne home to me how far I really was from what I had to become. And I said to somebody with a smile: "I marvel how in Yoga diagnosis and treatment can be one!" But that is another story. To resume.

I had seen Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1924. I have published a record of the conversations I had with him in my *Among the Great* and described the strange pull of his magnetic personality. But I have not yet written about how he induced in me often enough a peace and bliss that did "pass understanding," and how, at such times, I would just sit alone on the sea-beach for hours in an indescribable ecstasy, especially after a contact with him, however fleeting. To think that even a momentary glimpse of him or the touch of his palm on my head in token of blessing could initiate such interludes too good to be true and, withal, too vivid to be doubted! It was years ago but I can still recapture my first experience of the thrill as though it happened only yesterday. I will try to portray it as best I can, if only to keep a record for a few seekers.

Let me own, at the outset, that I have never had any supraphysical visions after receiving his blessings—as has happened to many another. And how often have I not importuned him to grant me the glimpse of a miracle star or an angel light or some form of ether and flame, as had fallen to the lot of so many and so frequently! I could almost see my fat self-esteem melt away under my nose as, time and time again, many—who were not even his disciples—recounted to me in thrilled voices, what they had seen! Could I, after such repeated discomfitures, help bearing him a grudge as it were for having conjured up nothing for me to glimpse as I contemplated his marvellous face of calm and light? Nothing of the sort I had looked forward to ever happened; I saw nothing in my normal consciousness which was calculated to satisfy my deep thirst for divine miracles to be retailed later to my friends.* Nay, I was no authentic mystic, I said to myself with a sigh, not even a clairvoyant, woe is me!

But mystic or not, I did feel something, sometimes, which might have been acclaimed by me as equally startling if not miraculous had not my preconceptions led me to focus my expectation on something entirely different—something I missed and therefore regretted, regretted and therefore repined, repined and therefore blamed myself till, at the end of the logical sequence, I decided, with a pang in my heart, that I was a fellow too matter-of-fact by temperament to be declared passport-worthy to the Treasurer of the apocalyptic thrills of Yoga.

But something did come through—something at least as unforgettable as what, years later, Sri Aurobindo humorously dubbed "yogic miracles". What happened was that I felt that wherever I looked dripped bliss—sheer, unqualified, flawless bliss and what amazed me was that I could not trace its genesis in any shape or form. And once it was so intense and unwaning, this all-pervasive bliss, that I could not help feeling a little intrigued in the midst of my causeless rapture and asked myself how I would describe it if a friend were to drop in and cross-examine me as to its exact nature. A curious question formulated itself instantly (I was sitting intoxicated on the beach alone): "What is it that a human being loves most in life?" The answer burgeoned at once, equally from nowhere, voiced by my heart in ecstasy: "Air and light". And startled, as though my heart had suddenly developed a tongue, I heard it say to my imaginary cross-examiner in a voice deep with intoxication: "Well, what I feel is something that can enable me not to miss even light and air, supposing somebody kept me in a dark underground cell for the rest of my life."

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* It was years later that such miracles began happening to me—under the aegis of Indira Devi, who was to accept me as her Guru, in 1949. But the time has not come yet for me to speak about these.

A strange question and a strange answer! And what is perhaps stranger still is that the experience was repeated several times in my Ashram life though it did not last as long as it did when it possessed me for the first time: for full two days and a half.

But miraculous though it may sound to believers, hard-baked rationalists are unlikely to be impressed by this response which culminated so often in ecstasy. So, I would just recapitulate here a vivid experience I had on the 15th of November, 1928, in Lucknow: in other words, the antecedent call whose cumulative effect evoked the subsequent response. Those who have never experienced "a call", as mystics put it, may not find it convincing, but those who know something about spiritual verities will not, I am sure, find my description uninteresting in spite of the inadequacy of my penmanship. I only regret that I will have to put it briefly because to tell it as I should would require too much space. Let this much of apology suffice as a prelude to what I may well call a miracle, in that it led me to decide in five minutes on a step which changed the whole course of my life. It happened like this.

When I left Sri Aurobindo in 1924—as I have described in my *Among the Great*—he did, in effect, reject me calling my seeking a mere "mental" one. I was indeed cut to the quick, but I simply had to wait till I might develop in me the strength I then lacked to cut the Gordian knot, to exploit a vivid if a well-worn metaphor.

But, as it turned out with me, I did not find that mere waiting helped; rather it increased my deep reluctance to take refuge in him unconditionally. Besides, I had felt anything but at my ease in the silent atmosphere in and about the Ashram. I was still too social an artist to relish the prospect of capitulating overnight to the grim Justiciary of Yoga, as I often put it in my care-free irreverence. I knew, indeed, that I was a seeker, but a seeker still vowed to Reason as his conscience-keeper. The motto of the great Paul Valerie still rang in my ears: *"Bacon dirait que cet intellect est un idol. J'y consens, mais je n'en ai trouve de meilleur."**

At the same time, my father's mysticism recurred to me: the devotional songs he had composed towards the end of his life I often sang now in a moved voice and with a deepening nostalgia (I translate here the closing lines of one of these):

My day is done . . . a truce to chaffering . . .
My debts are paid . . . I hear footfalls of Night . . .
World-weary now, to thee, O Mother, I cling:
Grant me thy lap where the dark dissolves in white.

My grandfather also: had he not turned eventually fron agnosticism to God-reliance? Had he not said on hi death-bed that he did not want to be consoled, since th One who had provided for him so well in this world woul surely take equal care of him in the next!

But, unlike them, I was in a peculiar position, a dilemma: on the one hand I was called to cut away from m moorings here and now while, on the other, I had not ye won anything which I might hold on to; so I hesitate and suffered till, in the end, I blurted it out to a frien who has since departed this life. He gave me a quizzica smile and said: "I will buy a ticket for you tomorrow make straight for your Guru's Ashram where you belong Surrender all you have and are to him."

"It's all very well to suggest remedies", I demurre ruefully. "But are you sure of the diagnosis?"

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* Bacon would say, this intellect is an idol. I agree, but have yet to find a better one.

Being a medical man he smiled appreciatively. Then he looked straight at me and asked: "What is the trouble?"

"I wish I knew", I answered bitterly. "I only know that I am groping and suffering in deep darkness. My Guru has not given me anything tangible yet. Surely you don't except me to give up everything for nothing?"

His face fell.

"Dilip," he said, after a pause, "you have been weighed and found wanting. You are *bargaining* with the Divine! *Quid pro quo*?* This is not the spirit which had moved those who staked their all in the past for the All-in-all. I was mistaken in you."

The shaft went home. . . . The whole night I could not sleep: I was bargaining! . . . bargaining! . . . bargaining! . . . I felt small in my own eyes. . . . And yet I could not take the plunge.

The next morning I sat down to meditate. I prayed to Gurudev as never before. Suddenly, when I found the pain in my heart unbearable, something happened. I cannot explain what it was but I felt that this time it was *he* who came to me.

I got up and took the next available train—in twenty minutes—to Bombay en route for Pondichery after despatching him a telegram.

* * *

The Mother told me, on November 22nd, that I had had a sudden psychic opening and so I had heard his call.

But I have done it—a dramatic indiscretion—even hough I can truthfully claim that I have not been guilty of any overstatement. My watchful and reticent friend Krishnaprem will, doubtless, take me to task again. But ince I have let the dramatist in me have a field day, I shall e indulgent and let the footlights remain yet awhile. After all, I am an artist by necessity and the artist must harbour an actor—till, at least, he dies to art to be reborn to Yoga—an enemy within the gates, I concede, but still dear to the artist if not the Yogi.

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* Something for something.

CHAPTER V

THE TRIALS

When the Madras train deposited me at the desolate station of Pondichery on that unforgettable morning in November, 1928, Sri Aurobindo's disciples in his Ashram numbered about 80. Now in 1951, we are a little over 800. I do not remember what was the proportion of women among us in those days but there were hardly any children. So, our Ashram courtyard basked in a delectable silence which receded progressively as the inmates increased and imported more and more children who had to be accepted for their parents's sakes.

Still "the noiseless tenor of our lives" was not marred appreciably till after 1940 or, maybe, even later. Before that we were a serious crew in all conscience, the bulk as impeccably grave and dignified as one could wish. But even when I looked askance at such sombre acolytes, my disapproval of their deportment was prompted less by malice than by my sheer inability to sympathise with their temperaments—and that also because I have seen the harm slogans do when one is not on one's guard: they lull one too often, alas, with the pathetic delusion that quoting wisdom is nearly as good as growing into it. (Sri Aurobindo wrote to me once: *"Perhaps X had come to believe it himself—that he had become a superman—as George IV came to believe that he had won the battle of Waterloo by dint of repeatedly saying so".*) But in return I will willingly wish them the joy of gloating over my deep discomfiture by furnishing them with evidence of Gurudev's disapproval of my admiration for the Russellian type of rationalism, as, for example, when he wrote to me soon after I came to the Ashram:*

"Dilip, I have not forgotten Russell, but I have neglected him first, for want of time; second, because for the moment I have mislaid your letter; third, because of lack of understanding on my part. What is the meaning of his 'taking interest in external things for their own sakes?' And what is an 'introvert'? Both these problems baffle me.

"The word 'introvert' has come into existence only recently and sounds like a companion of 'pervert'. Literally it means one who is turned inwards. The Upanishad speaks of the doors of the senses that are turned outwards, absorbing man in external things ('for their own sakes', I suppose?) and of the rare man among a million who turns his vision inwards and sees the Self. Is that man an introvert? And is Russell's ideal man 'interested in externals for their own sakes'—a Ramaswami the chef, or Joseph, the chauffer, for instance—*homo externalis Russellius*, an extrovert? Or is an introvert one who has an inner life stronger than his external one—the poet, the musician, the artist? Was Beethoven in his deafness bringing out music from within an introvert? Or does it mean one who measures external things by an inner standard and is interested in them not 'for their own sakes' but for their value to the soul's self-development, its psychic, religious, ethical or other self-expression? Are Tolstoy and Gandhi examples of introverts? Or, in another field—Goethe? Or does it mean one who cares for external things only as they touch his own mind or else concern his ego? But that I suppose would include 999,999 men out of every million.

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* I invited his comment on Russell's remark in his 'Conquest of Happiness': "We are all prone to the malady of the introvert who, with the manifold spectacle of the world spread out before him, turns away and gazes upon the emptiness within."

"What are external things? Russell is a mathematician. Are mathematical formulae external things, even though they exist here only in the World-mind and the mind of Man? If not, is Russell, as mathematician, an introvert? Again, Yajnavalkya says that one loves the wife not for the sake of the wife, but for the Self's sake, and so with other objects of interest and desire—whether the self be the inner Self or the ego. In Yoga it is the valuing of external things in terms of the desires of the ego that is discouraged—their only value is their value in the manifestation of the Divine. Who desires external things 'for their own sakes' and not for some value to the conscious being? Even Cheloo, the day-labourer, is not interested in a four-anna piece for its own sake, but for some vital satisfaction it can bring him; even with the hoarding miser it is the same—it is his vital being's passion for possession that he satisfies, and that is something not external but internal, part of his inner make-up, the unseen personality that moves inside behind the veil of the body.

"What is then meant by Russell's 'for their own sakes'? If you enlighten me on these points, I may still make an effort to comment on his *mahavakya* (great dictum).

"More important is his wonderful phrase about the 'emptiness within'! On that at least I hope to make a comment one day or another."

The above letter meant much to me even though I could not accept to be so easily knocked out—in the very first round. I wrote back to him quoting from a book of Lytton Strachey about some idols in a potter's shop. "One fine morning," I wrote, "the potter discovered, to his utter amazement, that the lesser idols had all been hurled to the ground and blown to smithereens by the biggest which alone grandly survived. But in this case, Guru, you have not achieved nearly as complete a victory since one has at least escaped annihilation: Bertrand Russell. And he still survives because, unlike many far-famed Yogis, he talks sense (and not childish rubbish) when adjudicating e.g. on the place of mind in life or of marriage in human relationship. Fortunately for us, Guru, you happen to be an exception among the Yogis but all the same let me humbly submit it as a possibility that maybe you can hold your own against men of Russell's calibre not so much because of your spiritual stature as because of your massive mind, intellectual clarity and unimpeachable character. So, I hope you will please allow me to doubt if you could have duelled thus with Russell in his own den and, in the end, bearded him had you been a spiritual giant but a mental dwarf. Also, I venture to suggest that you are doing a grave injustice to your own human equipment—your erudition, character, mental perspicacity etc. which have stood you here in good stead." Also I made bold to point out to him how much he had in common with the great philosopher and thinker, his butt, quoting among other things from the latter's famous and inspiring 'Free Man's Worship': "To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation . . . by death, by illness, by poverty, or by the voice of duty, we must learn, each of us, that the world was not made for us, and that, however beautiful may be the things we crave, Fate may nevertheless forbid them. It is part of courage, when misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hope, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to Power is not only just and right; it is the very gate of wisdom."

And I went on to add:

"You must bear with me, Guru, if I quote something again from Russell—not for your benefit but mine: you see, I feel guilty, because I have not stressed so far, as I should have, that there is a deeper side—of vision—to his nature. So I have translated into Bengali verse a fairly long passage from his 'Free Man's Worship' which will speak for itself".

Here is the passage:

"In the spectacle of Death, in the endurance of intolerable pain, and in the irrevocableness of a vanished past, there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence, in which, as by some strange marriage of pain, the sufferer is bound to the world by bonds of sorrow. In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose waves we toss for a brief hour. From the great night without, a chill blast breaks in upon our refuge; all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. Victory, in this struggle with the powers of darkness, is the true baptism into the glorious company of heroes, the true initiation into the overmastering beauty of human existence."

He wrote back: "Your translation is admirable. I did not know that the mathematician was also a poet." Then he went on to add, possibly a trifle aroused:

"About Russell—I have never disputed his abilities or his character; I am concerned only with his opinions and there too only with those opinions which touch upon my province—that of spiritual Truth. In all religions, the most narrow and stupid even, and in all non-religions also, there are great minds, great men, fine characters. I know little about Russell, but I never dreamed of disputing the greatness of Lenin, for instance, merely because he was an atheist—nobody would, unless he were an imbecile. But the greatness of Lenin does not debar me from refusing assent to the credal dogmas of Bolshevism, and the beauty of character of an atheist does not prove that spirituality is a lie of the imagination and that there is no Divine. I might add that if you can find the utterances of famous Yogis childish when they talk of marriage or on other matters, I cannot be blamed for finding the ideas of Russell about spiritual experience, of which he knows nothing, very much wanting in light and substance. You have not named the Yogis in question and till you do, I am afraid I shall cherish a suspicion about either the height or the breadth of their spiritual experience. But of that hereafter, when I get a chance of an hour or two to write on it."

Later when I began to see various colours etc., he wrote to me in answer to my question whether it could be auto-suggestion or hallucination:

"No, it was neither optical illusion nor hallucination nor coincidence (chromatic) nor auto-suggestion nor any of the other ponderous and vacant polysyllables by which physical science tries to explain away or rather avoid explaining the (scientifically) inexplicable. In these matters the scientist is always doing what he is always blaming the layman for, for when the latter lays down the law on things about which he is profoundly ignorant without investigation or experiment, without ascertained knowledge simply by evolving a theory or an *a priori* idea out of his own mind and plastering it as a label on the unexplained phenomena."

And then he went on to add, incidentally having a fling at the Russellian outlook:

"As for what showed itself to you, it was not a mere curious phenomenon, not even merely a symbolic colour, but things that have a considerable importance. . . . That this should be the first thing shown when the power of vision broke through its state of latency is very significant; it proves that you are in contact, the touch is already there in your inner being and that His force of presence and protection is already around you or over you as an environing influence.

"Develop this power of that inner sense and all that it brings you. These first seeings are only an outer fringe—

behind lie whole worlds of experience which fill what seems to the natural man the gap (your Russell's inner void) between the earth-consciousness and the Eternal and Infinite."

Lastly, he wrote in a post-script: "I remember when I first began to see inwardly (and outwardly also with the open eye), a scientific friend of mine began to talk of after-images—'these are only after-images!' I asked whether after-images remained before the eye for two minutes at a time—he said, 'no', to his knowledge 'only for a few seconds.' I also asked him whether one could get after-images of things not around one or even existing upon earth since they had other shapes, another character, other hues, contours and a very different dynamism, life-movements and values—he could not reply in the affirmative. That is how these so-called scientific explanations break down as soon as you pull them out of their cloudland of mental theory and face them with the actual phenomena they pretend to decipher."

In another letter he wrote commenting on an experienc of mine: "I repeat what I have said before—though you physical mind does not yet believe—that these experiences show at once that your inner being is a Yogi capable o trance, ecstasy, intensest *bhakti*, fully aware of Yoga an Yogic consciousness and showing himself the ver moment you get inside yourself even as the oute man is very much the other way round—modernised externalised, vigorously outward-vital and knowin nothing of Yoga or the world of inner experience I could see at once when I saw you that ther was this inner Yogi and your former experience here were quite convincing to anyone who knows anythin at all about these things. When there is this inner Yog inside, the coming to the way of Yoga is sure and n even the most externalised surface consciousness—(n even a regular *homo Russellius* outside, and you are n that—only a little *Russellicatus* on the surface)—can pr vent final success in the Yoga. But the tussle between the inward and outward man can create a lot of trouble because the inward man pushes towards the Divine and will not let go and the outward man regrets, repines, pulls back, asks what is this shadowy thing to which he is being brought, this unknown, this (to him) far-off Ineffable. That, and not merely food or society, is the genesis of the struggle and trouble in you. And yet it is all a misunderstanding—for if the outer gave way entirely to the inner Yogi, he would find that what he lost or thought he was losing would be repaid a hundredfold—though he would get it in another spirit and consciousness, not any longer the transient and deceptive delight of the world for its own sake, but the delight of the Divine in the world a thousand times more intense, sweet and desirable."

I quote the above to underline the difficulty he experienced to persuade us to open ourselves to his wisdom and, incidentally, to stress his inexhaustible patience in dealing with the likes of us. For instance he would, tirelessly, go on arguing with me again and again whenever I would lament that I did not find anything in myself which might justify his high hopes of me as a prospective Yogi. Nay, he would even come down to my level to convince my scepticism and, sometimes with the driest of intellectual arguments, he would outmanoeuvre me with my own weapons.

It was because he allowed us such liberties that we could go on treating him almost as our equal in stature—so much so that Nirod (who later became one of his personal attendants) often ran full tilt into him whenever his daemon impelled him to. I will give here just one or two examples.

"O Guru", he once wrote in 1935, "I observe that whenever I communicate an experience to you, the next moment it stops. I hope the Guru is not responsible for this?"

"Well," Gurudev wrote back, "that is a thing we used often to note when the *sadhana* was in the early stages.

namely, to speak of something experienced was to stop it. It is the reason why many Yogis make it a rule never to speak of their experiences. But latterly it had altogether ceased to be like that. So why are you starting that curious stunt all over again?"

But Nirod was nothing if not dauntless.

"I recall an incident of my childhood days", he wrote back. "I was dining with my father when I was called out. 'Papa', I said to him warningly, 'take care, you mustn't eat my fish.' Well, fathers may not, but Gurus?"

"No, Sir," Gurudev retorted, "I don't eat your fish. I have oceans of fish at my disposal and have no need to consume your little sprats. It is Messrs. Hostile Forces who do that—the *dasyus*, robbers."

He was always like that—had never any weakness for lording it over the weak whom he actually invited to "discuss things" familiarly with him. And he did it so unostentatiously that we often forgot how ill-equipped we were when we presumed to break a lance with him almost as though he had as much to learn from us, garrulous dwarfs, as we from him, the reticent giant! I well remember how I used to dash off just what came to me—on the most diverse topics imaginable—only to receive his comments the next morning, little realising that it cost him what he valued even more than his health and well-being, to wit, time, *his* time! But as it is little use being wise after the event, I will give a few typical instances to bring into relief the greatness of his condescension against the background of our thoughtless levity.

No, I must use the *mot juste* for the word condescension will not do when what floats before my mind is his compassion, for nothing less could possibly make us stake our all for one who, to all outward seeming, lived remote —almost in a far cloudland of unreality so far as we were concerned—and yet could inspire us with a deep sense of progressive fulfilment. I recall an Urdu ghazal which I once translated and often sang to describe this:

Thou wok'st my heart to thy memory
And mad'st the world parched . . . pale as sand :
How shall I sing thy diamond gifts
Or limn thy Bounty's wonderland?
My prayer was given before I prayed :
The jewels of thy skies were mine.
The past became a scroll on waves
Beneath thy newlit summit-sign,
From me, who had no claim for meed,
Never would thy Grace one boon withhold :
Who but thy self could answer earth
With squanderings of the heavenly gold?

To those who did not know him, all this may seem somewhat of an overstatement since it was not given to us to come in contact with him in a give-and-take of what we call friendship. But those who came to know him could only wonder how he moved people thus to their depths—he who (to exploit a Bengali idiom) was known as a "denizen of the deeps"; whom none had seen affected by even the most terrible of shocks, the fearless revolutionary who meditated calmly in a prison-cell when the hangman's rope was in the offing; who, a week before he passed away, had smiled affectionately when an attendant, a disciple wanted to call in a doctor.

"Where did you go, Nirod?" he asked when the other returned.

"To fetch the doctor," he answered apologetically.

"Doctor? What for? Have you lost your head?"

Yes, such was he: moving through life even as a "squanderer of the heavenly gold," but never asking anything from anybody in any shape or form.

Once, when an offer came from Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan that he would introduce him to the West if he wrote a philosophical article for the Westerners, he declined.

"Look here!" he wrote back to me. "Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is 'overwhelming' enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

"And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher—although I have written philosophy, which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it and why? First, because Paul Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his head to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self! Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!

"I don't know how to excuse myself to Radhakrishnan —for I can't say all that to him. Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps: 'so occupied, not a moment for any other work, can't undertake because he might not be able to carry out his promise.' What do you say?"

I wrote what I could to Sir Sarvapalli but he importuned. So once again I wrote to Gurudev imploring him that he comply. In the end I even tried to coax him:

"Your name, Sir, is not yet known to the West and Sir Radhakrishnan will give you wide publicity, fancy that! Besides, he is right and rational . . . etc."

But he was adamant and wrote back:

"As to Radhakrishnan, I do not care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the contribution from me. But the first fact is that it is quite impossible for me to write philosophy to order. If something comes to me of itself, I can write, if I have time. But I have no time.

I had some thought of writing to Adhar Das pointing out that he was mistaken in his criticism of my ideas about consciousness and intuition and developing briefly what were my real views about these things. But I have never been able to do it. I might as well think of putting the moon under my arm, Hanuman-like—although in his case it was the sun—and going for a walk. The moon is not available and the walk is not possible. It would be the same if I promised to Radhakrishnan—it would not be done, and that would be much worse than a refusal.

"And the second fact is that I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known as a 'leader'. Then again I don't believe in advertisement except for books, and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is poison. It means either a stunt or a boom, and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crests and leave it lifeless and broken, high and dry on the shores of nowhere—or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the 'religions' and is the reason of their failure. If I tolerated a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counter-weight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would defeat the object. I am perfectly 'rational', I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on my personal dislike of fame. If and in so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable."

And yet he went on writing reams and reams of letters to such as we—for hours on end for years and years!

Yes, to our reason he was baffling, although he claimed that he was "perfectly rational." But I find it difficult to take him at his word because I have not yet been able to find a clue to the mystery of his strange personality which not only drew us to him but made us cleave to his all but invisible self in spite of the hypnotic pull of multitudinous life outside. But to give a few more instances of how subtly he led us on to "discuss" things with him and in what a carefree way!

"O Guru," I wrote, "I enclose a fine poem of Nishikanta's entitled, *The Yawning West*. Incidentally, I was telling him yesterday about Europe's frantic drive for the charnel-house in a fit of 'rationalised lunacy', as Russell puts it in his latest book, *In Praise of Idleness*. There he laments the imminent devastation of the coming War with the consequent holocaust of the finest ideals cherished by a handful of dreamers. Let me quote to you a few passages from his book which I wish my activist friend X would ponder a little.

"After castigating 'compulsory military service, boy-scouts, the dissemination of political passion by the Press,' etc. Russell girds at the blind restlessness of pugnacious activism thus:

'We are all more aware of our fellow-citizens than we used to be, more anxious, if we are virtuous, to do them good, and in any case to make them do us good. We do not like to think of anyone lazily enjoying life, however refined may be the quality of his enjoyment. We feel that everybody ought to be doing something to help on the great cause—whatever it may be—the more so as so many bad men are working against it and ought to be stopped. We have not the leisure of mind, therefore, to acquire any knowledge except such as will help us fight for whatever it may happen to be that we think important.'

"O Guru, what, I wonder, will be X's rejoinder to this sarcasm of Russell directed against his darling activism which, thanks to its blindness wedded to greedy self-aggrandisement, is today crushing out our delicate soul-aspirations for all that is noble and beautiful in life?. . ."

"But Dilip," he wrote back promptly, "you forget that X is a politician and the rationality of politicians has, perforce, to move within limits: if they were to allow themselves to be as clear-minded as Russell, their occupation would be gone! It is not everybody who can be as cynical as a Birkenhead or as philosophical as a C. R. Das and go on with political reason or political make-believe in spite of knowing what it all came to, from *arrivisme* in the one and patriotism in the other case."

"But no, Guru," I protested, "I have not forgotten it any more than I have forgotten the blazing fact that any show of busy enthusiasm is applauded in this gullible age as the worthiest exploitation of our vitality which makes puppets of us all, mostly with the pathetic delusion that we are serving humanity! What I was regretting was X's penchant for activism for its own sake, to undertake a mountain of labour to produce a mouse, believing, alas, (to quote your own remark on him) that '*by human intellect and energy making always a new rush, everything can be put right*.' I wish my friend would try to develop a little more sober vision if only to be delivered from this sad delusion that by blind energy and rudimentary logic one could salve the shipwreck of civilisation. The stalwarts of the West have tried that game for centuries and the result has been—but why not hear Russell in his own words?—

'When the indemnities were imposed, the Allies regarded themselves as consumers; they considered that it would be pleasant to have the Germans work for them as temporary slaves, and to be able themselves to consume, without labour, what the Germans had produced. Then, after the treaty of Versailles had been concluded, they suddenly remembered that they were also producers, and the influx of German goods which they had been demanding would ruin their industries. They were so puzzled that they started scratching their heads, but that did no good, even when they all did it together and called it an International Conference. The plain fact is that the governing classes of the world are too ignorant and stupid to think through such a problem and too conceited to ask the advice of those who might help them'.

"O Guru, how I wish X would not attach much value to Reason's inordinate pretentions which often make people so blind to stark reality such as this! *Qu'en dites-vous?*'

"You are right, Dilip," he wrote back. "Only you again seem to forget that human reason is a very convenient and accommodating instrument and works only in circles set for it by interest, partiality and prejudice. The politicians reason wrongly or insincerely and have power to enforce the results of their reasoning so as to make a mess of the world's affairs: the intellectuals reason and show what their minds show them, which is far from being always the truth, for it is generally decided by intellectual preference and the mind's inborn or education-inculcated angle of vision,—but even if they see the Truth, they have no power to enforce it. So between blind power and seeing impotence the world moves, achieving destiny through mental muddle."

I adduced, in reply, Russell's fling at national planning: "When a nation, instead of an individual, is seized by lunacy, it is thought to be displaying remarkable industrial wisdom!"

"*Seized* by lunacy?" he commented: "Well, this implies that the nation is ordinarily led by reason. But *is* it? Or even by common sense? Masses of men act upon their vital push, not according to reason: individuals too do the same. If they call in reason, it is as a lawyer to plead the vital's cause."

I have quoted in full his letters on Russell for another reason which I may as well state here.

During the first few years of my Ashram life I simply did not know what to do with my Russellian scepticism in the face of Gurudev's deep disapproval of the fool's obstinate recalcitrance to spiritual experience. But this landed me in another dilemma: on the one hand, I could not discard Russell whose intellectual clarity and integrity of character I profoundly admired: on the other, even when I could not fully understand Gurudev's deeper wisdom and wider vision, I could not help but warm up to his exhortations. Unfortunately, however, the see-saw did not cease; for although there was not a vestige of doubt in my mind as to who should be followed, theoretically, it so happened that despite Gurudev's unanswerable arguments I found myself unable, in practice, to accept, once for all, that Russell had better be discredited as a guide to wisdom in general. This dualism of mine in its turn, was sharply criticised by Krishnaprem to whom, alas, I turned, foolishly, for sympathy. For on this issue he evinced a heart of adamant and stormed at me from distant Almora:

"Why do you keep harping on Russell? I quite agree he is a fine man in many ways and a fine thinker of his own sort but why do you keep hoping that your Gurudev or someone else will answer his sceptical arguments? If you accept Russell's premisses you will be forced into his conclusions but then why accept his premisses? He is no muddle-headed thinker whose conclusions are at fault with his premisses. Quite the reverse. If you set foot on an escalator you will be automatically carried to the top of it; so why set foot on it at all when you see it going in the wrong direction?"

But there, precisely, lay the greatness of Gurudev's character. He never minded if any of us wanted to experiment with an escalator "going in the wrong direction." For he had never believed in hard and fast taboos. His tolerance and charity would have been incredible had it not been a fact of everyday experience. In the Ashram he tolerated a number of disgruntled fire-eaters who called themselves his disciples and went on giving a long rope even to some insolent rebels who, from calling him names and misrepresenting his catholic views, told deliberate lies—just to do him down. Even such calumniators and traitors he not only declined to expel from the Ashram but actually forgave again and again till I had to ask him which he loved more: to encourage the faithless or discourage the faithful?

As I look back in retrospect, somewhat sadly, I realise how often I myself have misunderstood him in the past. Perhaps I had to—his patience, charity and tolerance having been a little too incredible even for human credulity. For I did, often enough, feel impatient of his superhuman patience when some others took advantage of it. At such times, I conveniently forgot how much I myself had profited by his patient acceptance of the burden of my obstinate ego and assertive self-importance. How often, indeed, had I rebelled, yet not once did he scold me—not even when I doubted his love and wisdom in my rebellious moods! Time and again, when I wrote to him that I had decided to leave the Ashram for good, he came to me with the balm of his affection, understanding and infinite tolerance not only forgiving the insolence of my repeated ultimatums but assuring me again and again:

"You need not imagine that we shall ever lose patience or give you up—that will never happen. Our patience, you will find, is tireless because it is based upon unbounded sympathy and love. *Human love may give up, but divine love is stable and does not falter*. We know that the aspiration of your psychic being is sincere. It is because the sincere aspiration is there that we have no right to disbelieve in your *adhikara* for the Yoga.

"These difficulties do not last for ever—they exhaust themselves and disappear. But to reject them when they come is the quickest way to get rid of them for ever."

Nevertheless I could not, for the life of me, reject out of hand the hostile suggestion which got the better of me in my wrong moods. I will refer here to two of the numerous crises I had to undergo.

The first serious "attack," if I may so put it, developed in March, 1930. I had been feeling listless after the subsidence of the first flush of joy and optimism till, suddenly, I made a faux pas which brought matters rapidly to a head.

It happened like this. Gandhiji's famous Dandi march had just been announced in the papers: they would break the law by making salt from sea-water and court prison. In my despair, I wrote to Gurudev that I had decided to go to prison, giving up Yoga, the more so as I could not bring myself to believe in his fantastic doctrine of the "hostile forces". I challenged him to prove his thesis and mocked at the idea of invisible phantom forces, such as he posited, swaying sensible (?) men like us. This time, I imagine, Gurudev wrote *without* a smile of irony.

"Dilip," he repeated, "it is certainly the force hostile to Yoga and the divine realisation upon earth that is acting upon you at the present moment. It is the force (one force and not *many*) which is here in the Ashram and has been going about from one to another. With some as with B, V and P, it has succeeded; others have cast it away from them. . . . Some are still struggling, but, in spite of the bitterness of the struggle, have been able to keep faithful to the divine call that brought them here.

"That it is the same hostile force would be shown, even if its presence were not for us visible and palpable, by the fact that the suggestions it make to the minds of the victims are always the same. Its one master sign is always this impulse to get away from the Ashram, away from myself and the Mother, out of this atmosphere, and *at* *once*. For the force does not want to give time for reflection, for resistance, for the saving Power to be felt and act. Its other signs are doubt; *tamasic* depression; an exaggerated sense of impurity and unfitness; the idea that the Mother is remote, does not care for one, is not giving what she ought to give, is not divine, with other similar suggestions accompanied by an inability to feel her presence or her help; a feeling that the Yoga is not possible or is not going to be done in this life; the desire to go away and do something in the ordinary world—the thing suggested varying itself according to the personal mind. If it were not this one invariable hostile force acting, there would not be this exact similarity in all the cases. In each case it is the same obscurities thrown on the intelligence, the same subconscious movements of the vital brought to the surface, the same irrational impulses pushing to the same action: departure, renunciation of the soul-truth, refusal of the Divine Love and the Divine call.

"It is the vital crisis, the test, the ordeal for you as for others—a test and ordeal which we would willingly spare those who are with us but which they call on themselves by persistence in some wrong line of movement or some falsification of the inner attitude. If you reject entirely the falsehood that this force casts upon the *sadhaka*, if you remain faithful to the Light that called you here, you conquer and, even if serious difficulties still remain, the final victory is sure and the divine triumph of the soul over Ignorance and the Darkness. . . .

"I do not wish to disguise from you the difficulty of this great and tremendous change or the possibility that you may have a long and hard work before you; but are you really unwilling to face it and take your share in the great work? Will you reject the greatness of this endeavour to follow a mad, irrational impulse towards some more exciting work of the hour or the moment for which you have no true call in any part of your nature?

"There is no true reason for despondency; in nothing that has passed in you or which you have written do I find any good ground for it. The difficulties you experience are nothing to those that others have felt and yet conquered them, others who were not stronger than you. . . .

"All that is needed is for your psychic being to come forward and open to the direct and real constant inner contact of myself and the Mother. Hitherto your soul expressed itself through the mind and its ideals and admirations through the vital and its higher joys and aspirations; but that is not sufficient to conquer the physical difficulty and enlighten and transform Matter. It is your soul in itself, your psychic being, that must come in front, awake entirely and make the fundamental change. The psychic being will not need the support of the intellectual ideas or outer signs and helps. It is that alone that can give you in the direct feeling of the Divine, the constant nearness, the inner support and aid. You will not then feel the Mother remote or have any further doubt about the realisation; for *the mind thinks and the vital craves but the soul feels and knows the Divine*."

I can still recapture the thrill the last sentence gave me and I came back to normal.

Then came another attack which was more serious—a couple of years later. The cause of it was of course my egoism and self-will, but in my ignorance, I put it down to his aloofness.

"Why must you insist on staying thus in deep purdah," I asked him rebelliously, "when we should be dying to hear just a word of reassurance direct from your lips? To succeed in any Yoga of Guruvada, the Guru must be loved, must he not? But how can one love a being who has become so remote as to taper off into all but a rumour? I have prayed to you in silence to grant me an interview; if you had really been omniscient as many here stoutly claim, you would have heard my anguished prayer since I came to you not because of any frustration (I threw away my career in the full flush of an assured success) but because of my need for the Divine. And yet you rest in repose, sequestered in your ivory-tower of God-knows-what consciousness and look calmly on while we sink in this relentless slough of despond!

"But although I am determined to end such a sterile relationship which can be of little use to you and a source of pointless suffering to me, I cannot bring myself to depart unless you consent to dismiss me with your blessings. For strange as it may sound to you, I cannot do without your blessings even when I decline to go on with your impossible Yoga."

To that came a rejoinder which he alone could give in reply to such arrant nonsense.

"It is quite impossible for me to dismiss you or consent to your going away like this from us. If the idea of this kind of separation is possible to you, for us it is inconceivable that our close relation should end like this. I had thought that the love and affection the Mother and I bear you had been made evident by us. But if you say that you cannot accept it with the limitations on its outward manifestation that not our choice but inexorable necessity imposes on us for a time, I do not know how to convince you. I could not believe that you would find it in your heart to go or take such a step when it came to the point. As it is, I can only appeal to you not to allow yourself to be swept away by this attack, to remain faithful even in suffering to your soul that brought you here and to believe in our love that can never waver. . . ."

I could not "disbelieve" in spite of my "determination" and wrote to him that I lacked the strength to wrench myself free from such a clasp. But then a contrary thing happened just when I was regaining my equilibrium, and I stumbled once again: I was told by a friend, who also happened to be in the grip of a similar depression, that both Mother and Sri Aurobindo had given almost identical assurances to more than one "previous failures". Instantly my heart misgave me once more and I wrote asking him whether he could not possibly have made a mistake in choosing me--was he sure that I was not going to prove, like some of my predecessors, a spectacular failure?

To that he replied: "Do not believe all you hear.... You do not belong to yourself... *I have cherished you like a friend and a son* and have poured on you my force to develop your powers—to make an equal development in the Yoga. We claim the right to keep you as our own here with us."

As I look back, somewhat nostalgically, on those dear days when I used to receive such lovely letters at least thrice or four times a week, a very significant fact emerges of which I failed to take full cognisance at the time, to wit, that although he insisted on my receiving at his hands what he called *divine love*, it was always his *human* way of offering it that prevailed in the end and induced me to comply with his invitation to attempt what seemed to me all but impossible: the radical change of human nature and its reactions. Otherwise I should have given up long ago. What I mean by this is not easy to put in words, for often, when I try to portray what I felt then, I find that I tend to sound dramatic if not theatrical. It may be that I *was* somewhat dramatic at the time, unconsciously. Nevertheless I can only vouch for what I believe to be true: that even when all such histrionic impulses are discounted, something very beautiful crystallised out of every such psychological crisis, something that I would like to call the human element which crept in often enough imperceptibly in his self-expression and, like a laeven, transformed my deepening psychic gloom into joy. I do not know if my emphasis is convincing even now, but the experience was vivid enough: that had he chosen to rule out the human way of arguing and coaxing the faithless recalcitrant in me, all his divine powers in full display would have been unequal to the task of bringing me out of the wood everytime, giving my dwindling hope a new fillip or, shall I say, a new lease of life, as it were.

In annotation, I may quote here an extract from a letter I wrote to him, half in jest to conceal my deep penitence.

"You have told us, Guru," so I wrote, "that every *sadhaka* here represents a type and serves a Divine purpose in not only getting something from you but evoking something in you on the rebound. I have often wondered what purpose was served by *my* irruption here till the answer flashed, apocalyptically: I was sent here by the Divine to test your patience in a way none else possibly could: to bring out, that is, the difference between the human patience and the divine.

"But," I went on to add, "you have at least one advantage to which we, your assayers, cannot arrogate: your divinity. No wonder you can be so patient with us since it is after all we who suffer, not you. That is why, I suppose, you look so august when we see your face, *au-dessus de la melee*, and therefore unperturbed, buttressed probably by the Supramental! Inevitably, equipped as you are with a temperament such as yours—so aloof from what Russell loves to call 'the hard world of fact'!"

To that he promptly replied:

"But what strange ideas again!—that I was born with a Supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities—from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties constantly cropping up here in Pondichery, external and internal. *My life has been a battle; the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character.* But of course as we have not been shouting these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!"

"But is it altogether an illusion, Guru?" I pursued unconsoled. "You yourself have said in one of your famous messages which we, humans, have been exhorted to believe. It assures us: *'The Divine gives himself to those* *who give themselves without reserve in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of ananda!'* Now, I submit, if you wanted us to take all this not as mere rhetoric but as a concrete fact of indubitable experience, then it must follow that none would be able to take seriously your trials and tribulations, far less presume to feel any commiseration for you. For how *could* we feel a pang for you when you yourself assure us of this inexhaustible capital to your everlasting credit waiting to indemnify you against any loss past, present or future? And then, since you are in constant communication with this obliging Divine of yours, what have you really to long, suffer or sigh for? I have your letters telling me, first that, you had 'even initial realisations while pondering verses of the Upanishada or the Gita', and secondly that, '*in my case I walked into nirvana without intending it or rather nirvana walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave*'. Good Lord! How can such a one possibly imagine the stuff we, humans, are made of? An *Avatar* like you or even a mighty *Vibhuti** has only to apprise Him, your Omnipotent Commissariat, and He will give you with both (or shall I say, endless) hands all you need? For you and He being one, He cannot possibly refuse you what you ask any more than the hand can the mouth when the coveted food is handy."

His reply came: "Your descriptions of Avatars and prophets are magnificent in colour. I wish it were a sober fact that the Divine refuses us nothing—if He would start doing that, it would be glorious and I should not at all insist on constant beatitude. But from his representatives, Vibhutis, and Avatars, he exacts a good deal and expects them to overcome rather difficult conditions. No doubt they do not call for compassion, but, well, surely you can permit them an occasional divine right to a grumble?"

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* Vide Glossary

"Well Guru," I wrote back in a more conciliatory tone this time, "you can grumble on if it helps you overcome whatever difficulties confront you. But, at all events, do realise, for mercy's sake, that we cannot, even if we grumble away in full chorus and for all our worth, overcome such a difficulty as your smilelessness, not to mention any others. And now on top of it all you foist this stupendous Divine of yours on the fragile altars of our hearts, an Idol whose weight makes even you grumble. What hope is there then for the likes of us?"

To that he replied: "The Divine may be difficult, but His difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at Him. Even my smilelessness was overcome, which Nevinson had remarked with horror more than twenty years before—'the most dangerous man in India, Aurobindo Ghosh who never smiles'. He ought to have added: 'but who always jokes'—but he did not know that as I *was* very solemn with him, or perhaps I had not evolved sufficiently on that side then. Anyhow since you have overcome that—my smilelessness—you are bound to overcome all the other difficulties also."

(Henri W. Nevinson, the well-known author, came to India in 1907 as a correspondent of the Manchester Guardian and his book entitled *The New Spirit in India* published in 1908 made a deep impression not only on Indians but on the British bureaucracy as well, because he was not only gifted with vision but commanded a rare power of expression which could sway people. He sought out most men who were prominent in the then public life of our country and was most impressed by Sri Aurobindo's personality. Here is what he saw and felt in Sri Aurobindo even then:

"In an age of supernatural religion Aurobindo would have become what the irreligious mean by a fanatic. He was possessed by that concentrated vision, the limited and absorbing devotion. Like a horse in blinkers he ran straight, regardless of everything except the narrow bit of road in front. But at the end of that road he saw a vision more inspiring and spiritual than any fanatic saw who rushed on death with Paradise in sight. Nationalism to him was surrounded by a mist of glory, the halo that medieval saints beheld gleaming around the head of martyrs. Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dreams, indifferent to the means. 'Nationalism', he said in a brief address delivered in Bombay, early in 1908, 'is a religion that comes from God'.)

One of the reasons why I quote at some length this passage is that I know it for a fact that many an admirer of his, somewhat overawed by this intense gravity, have opined that though he was assuredly "the greatest intellectual of our age",* his penchant for knowledge had made it impossible to approve fully of love which revelled in emotion. Once, when a grave friend of mine voiced this judgment, I was a trifle scared. So I wrote to him a long letter in which among other things I asked (2.2.1932): "O Guru, I have always been fond of *bhakti* and love and emotion and so I feel frightened when I hear such grave opinions from highly worthy and sombre pundits. So please clarify and oblige." He answered at once (3.2.1932): "It is a misunderstanding to suppose that I am against *bhakti* or emotional *bhakti*—which comes to the same thing, since without emotion there can be no *bhakti*. It is rather the fact that in my writings on Yoga I have given *bhakti* the highest place. All that I have said at any time which could account for this misunderstanding was against an unpurified emotionalism which leads to want of balance. . . . But the insistence on purification does not mean that I condemn true feeling an emotion. . . . On the contrary, the deeper the emotion, the more intense the *bhakti*, the greater is the force for realisation and transformation. It is oftenest through intensity of emotion that the psychic being awakes and there is an opening of the inner doors to the Divine."

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* The quotation is from a sentence Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan wrote in his tribute after the passing of Sri Aurobindo (quoted in *The White Umbrella* University of California Press by Professor Mackenzie Brown, p. 126.)

And it is perfectly true that in his writings he has given the highest place to *bhakti*. To quote just two passages. In his masterly chapter entitled, *Mystery of Love* (Synthesis Of Yoga) he writes: "Love and Ananda are the last word of being, the secret of secrets, the mystery of mysteries. . . . There is nothing which is beyond the reach of the God-lover or denied to him; for he is the favourite of the Divine Lover and the self of the Beloved."

Also in his marvellous poem, *God*, he writes in the first verse:

Thou who pervadest all the worlds below
Yet sitst above,
Master of all who work and rule and know,
Servant of love.

Reminding one of the Bhagavat's famous confession of Lord Narayan to the sage, Durvasha: "*Aham bhakta-paradhino hyaswatantra iva dwija*" which means "I am not independent, O sage, but depend daily on my devotees."

And it was because the Love that flowered in him through years of one-pointed concentration on the Divine as Krishna (he wrote to me in a letter, dated 25.2.45, that his "realised identity" with Krishna was for him not "something philosophical or mental but a matter of daily and hourly realisation") had shed all its human dross that he could write to me in another intimate letter:

"It is only the divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of darkness towards the Divine. The Galileo-like *Je-m'en-fiche-ism** would not carry me one step: it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk, unweeping, towards the goal."

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* I do not care.

But strange as it may sound to many who are willing to take him as an embodiment of the Divine, that is, something beyond the ambit of human comprehension, the very assumption that he was divine, even when we could not define 'divinity' (except in that we could not claim him as one of us) made us fret and fume to the top of our bent. And from his watch-tower of summit-vision he must have seen that clearly, for has he not written, apropos, that mortality finds the unmitigated Divine so hard to bear that it is actually impelled to reject its boons of immortality?—

It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness . . .
Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law
It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers
And meets the sons of God with death and pain.

And it was not a mere regret he had vented but a deep tragedy for these "sons of God" that it had to be, down the ages,

"The cross their payment for the crown they gave."

In the Ashram most of us gave ample proof of being to some extent responsible for this grievous state of things insomuch that it weighed on our minds all the time, and yet we saw no way out, naturally, being not only sceptical about the possibility of the divinisation of the human elements in us, but actually hostile to it in practice, if not in theory, a fact which probably made him sigh in Savitri, VI, II:

"A dark concealed hostility is lodged
In the human depths, in the hidden heart of Time
That claims the right to change and mar God's work.

And that is why the reign of human suffering on earth cannot be put an end to immediately. No wonder—

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;
The world itself becomes his adversary,

His enemies are the beings he came to save.
The world is in love with its own ignorance.".

Yes, he had, indeed, his work cut out and he knew it. Years ago he wrote to me that he had been "*dredging, dredging, dredging, the mire of the subconscious*", and he hinted at the same resistance in a letter to Nirod: "*It (the Supramental Light) was coming down before November,* 1934, but afterwards all the mud arose and it stopped. But there are red crimson lights. One is Supramental Divine Love, the other Supramental Physical Force." Somewhat at sea, I asked him what was his drift. He sent me only four lines of an unpublished poem by way of explanation which I quoted subsequently in my *Among the Great*:

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
*And tread the dolorous way.**

But to revert to the human. For I do not want to convey the impression that although we were often enough conscious of our deep limitations, we were always unhappy on that account or that Gurudev wanted us to go on our way brooding profitlessly about our shortcomings and lapses. Did he not once write to me that he had all along wanted me to follow the sunlit path? But even such a beneficent counsel put me in a wry mood, and I wrote to him asking him whether "this beautiful sunlit path" could be open to such as we? Anyhow, I persevered in reminding him of his dark hints in the past that his Integral Yoga bristled with difficulties. Had he not also written in an oft-quoted letter of his: "*I call no one in the world, nor am I here to convert anybody*" etc.? In the end I wrote: "Such being your published views, why do you object to the path of *vairagya* which I propose to take especially when I feel deeply discouraged by all sorts of adverse suggestions?"

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* **Published subsequently in his poem, "A God's Labour".**

To this he replied, once again, with his characteristic understanding and solicitude:

"It is evident that something in you, continuing the unfinished curve of a past life, is pushing you on the path of *vairagya*—in spite of our preference for a less painful one—something that is determined to be drastic with the outer nature so as to make itself free to fulfil its secret aspiration. But do not listen to these suggestions of the voice that says: 'You shall not succeed and it is no use trying'. That is a thing that need never be said in the Way of the Spirit, however difficult it may seem at the moment to be. Keep through all the aspiration which you express so beautifully in your poems; for it is certainly there and comes out from the depths, and if it is the cause of suffering—as great aspirations are, in the world and nature where there is so much to oppose them—it is also the promise and surety of emergence and victory in the future".

To which I replied that it was because I was a born sceptic that I wondered whether there really was an easier way, "the sunlit path", in this world of dominant shadows.

He answered in the affirmative and wrote:

"The sunlit path can only be followed if the psychic is constantly or usually in front or if one has a natural spirit of faith and surrender or a face habitually turned towards the sun or psychic predisposition (e.g. faith in one's destiny) or acquired the psychic turn. That does not mean that the 'sunlit man' has no difficulties; he may have many, but he regards them cheerfully as 'all in the day's work'; but if he gets a bad beating, he is capable of saying: 'Well, that was a queer go, but the Divine is evidently in a queer mood and if that is His way of doing things, it must be the right one; I am surely a queerer fellow myself and that, I suppose, was the only means of putting me right'. But everybody can't be of that turn, and surrender which would put everything right is, as you say, difficult to achieve completely. That is why we do not insist on total surrender at once, but are satisfied with a little to begin with, the rest is to grow as it can."

But do what we would, we simply could not keep our faces "turned towards the sun", feeling sometimes too deeply discouraged by the darkness that deepened before us as we trudged on. But although it was true that the more we tried to follow the easier sunlit path, the more we found it difficult to cleave to the right attitude, yet it would be untrue to say that the struggle brought us nothing but pain: it taught us invaluable lessons; unmasked little by little the subtlest tricks of the ego; gave us joy whenever we fought its suggestions down and often enough got our self-will to bow progressively to the Guru's will or our pride to chase the false preconceived notions so that the true notions might have some niches to settle in like the white doves of purity. And last, though not least, there was the thrill, day after day, of receiving *his* letters—on art and science, religion and politics, philosophy and literature, the way of all flesh and the ascent to God's Grace redeeming flesh . . . was there any theme he could not write about and improvise on in a vein at once rapturous and incredible! And, to think that he should have gone on writing about all this to such as we, poor elfs, who constantly "turned upon his saviour hand of Grace", to put it in his own words!

CHAPTER VI

*"BLEEDING PIECE OF EARTH"**

ONE of the things that make Ashram life so hard to bear is that it first invites one to change, then exhorts, then coaxes and lastly presses one to realise that unless and until one agrees to change progressively, the divine life must remain a Utopian dream. Somebody said that human folly makes even angels weep because human idiocy is the only malady for which even the gods can find no medicine. Sri Aurobindo, however, was wont to put it in a different way. He said that it was not folly alone, but some kind of perversity which something in us thrills to that makes it so difficult even for angels to deliver fools from their cherished bondage. It is this insurmountable snag in the composition of nature that made Vivekananda cry out: "The scheme of the world is devilish." The sigh, alas, is as old as the sky. Somehow, things insist on going awry progressively no matter what we will or do. That is why the word 'fatality' has come to exercise an almost hypnotic influence on the minds of even the most robust among men. Sri Aurobindo has underlined the tragedy of this seeming fatality (I stress the word 'seeming' because he does not accept fatality or its foster-child astrology, except in a very modified sense) in his epic *Savitri* in the mouth of the pessimist fatalist Queen-mother. She expounds it, indeed, as her own individual point of view but who will dare deny, when one looks at man and the world as they are, that it is almost completely convincing so far as it goes (Savitri VI. I):

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* Antony (to the dead body of Caesar):

O! pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth . . . .
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
That ever lived in the tide of times.

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene 1

An idiot hour destroys what centuries made,
His wanton rage or frenzied hate lays low
The beauty and greatness by his genius wrought
And the mighty output of a nation's toil.

A few weeks ago, a Korean lady wrote to Pundit Nehru a letter in which she deplored how even those who came as champions of the safety of Korea were responsible for unleashing further devastation on the poor country. To state just one single act and follow its concatenation of consequences: the south Korean capital Seoul was bombarded by the North Koreans who professed to come as its liberators. Result—devastation, followed by the retreat of the invaders in occupation: the North Koreans. Next, enter the Chinese Communists, they bombard again. Result—further devastation, followed by retreat once more of the liberators in occupation: the South Koreans and the Americans. Then the Americans bombard Seoul to liberate Korea once more from its old "liberators" to be followed by the counter-attack of the Chinese and so it goes on! But after such vicious bombardments of "liberation" how much of the unhappy town can possibly survive? The same thing happened with Poyangang, the capital of North Korea: first came the South Koreans who devastated it—this time as the liberators *en revanche*, next the North Korean followed by the Chinese communists, the latest liberators now in occupation, to be possibly supplanted once more by the South Koreans—almost like a perpetual-motion pendulum!

Now it must be remembered that only one act was responsible for all this: the crossing of the 38th parallel by the North Koreans as "liberators" (whatever the word may mean). Not even their worst enemies would assert that they could have anticipated the release of such an avalanche of calamities as the result of just one button pressed: their crossing of a geographical line. And it was not an accident: unforeseen catastrophes have been brought off again and again in history by just one misdemeanour; one outrage, one miscalculation. Was Sri Aurobindo guilty of an over-statement when he wrote: "*An idiot hour destroy what centuries made*"?

I remember his reply, long ago in 1924, to my question on "the wide-spread misery, fear and suffering which afflict men":

"How can you help that so long as men choose as they do to hug ignorance which is at the root of all suffering? As long as they cherish the darkness of attachment rather than the light of liberation and knowledge, how can they expect to see?"* Years later, he expounded his outlook on pain, its rationale, in his *Savitri*, hinting that although,

Where Ignorance is, there suffering, too, must come,

yet the very suffering, which is the offspring of ignorance, serves one, in the Divine enigmatic economy, as a goad to the search for a panacea to the evil of suffering, viz. pain and grief:

Pain is the hammer of the gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
And never thought to exceed the human start.

Nietzsche caught something of the Divine Resolve, amounting to a predetermination, when he said: "*Der Mensch ist Etwas das ueberwunden werden soll.*'† But, as Sri Aurobindo points out, this ultimate self-transcendence cannot be achieved if man unwarily sides with the power-addict Demon (Asura) in himself to the exclusion of the love-inebriate God—so sings Narad, the protagonist of the Divine Aspiration:

O mortal, bear this great world's law of pain,
In thy hard passage through a suffering world
Lean for thy soul's support on Heaven's strength,
Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace!

But he warns him, withal, against admitting a wrong movement in his impatient exploration of a short cut:

Haste not towards Godhead on a dangerous road,
Open not thy doorways to a nameless Power,
Climb not to Godhead by the Titan's road.

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* *Among the Great* (American Edition), p. 221 where he also mentions, for the first time in public, what was the aim of his Yoga.

† Man is something that has to be transcended.

Because the deluded Titan is motivated not by the spirit of God-allegiance, but by God-defiance—and therefore.

Heavenward he clambers on a stair of storms . . . . .
He strives with a giant strength to wrest by force
From life and Nature the immortals' right,

because having grown blind in his lust for quick results,

He waits not for the outstretched hand of God
To raise him out of his mortality.

In the Gita we find a description of the salient features of the *Asura's* character. But Sri Aurobindo's description gives us a much fuller view (because the modern Asura, even as the modern human, has become a much more complex and sophisticated being):

A monopolist of the world-energy,
He dominates the life of common men.
His pain and others' pain he makes his means:
On death and suffering he makes his throne.

And therefore he grows and grows in stature till—by the inescapable law of Karma, as the Gita puts it—he identifies himself with the Colossus, Selfhood, the Image of his adoration, *yo yachchhraddhah sa eva sah.** That this is not a fanciful nightmare must become obvious to anyone who will look at what is happening in the world around us, in and through every power-addict Dictator who inflates himself into a colossal Demon of the vital, a veritable Titan of whom Sri Aurobindo says:

A mighty energy, a monster god,
Hard to the strong, implacable to the weak . . .
To have power, to be master, was sole virtue
It claimed the whole world for Evil's living room,
Its party's grim totalitarian reign
The cruel destiny of breathing things.

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* A man grows into what he worships.

All on one plan was shaped and standardised
Under a dark dictatorship's breathless weight.

This is not an overdrawn picture; nor has one to be a mystic or a Yogi to be able to see that this has been one of the major causes of human misery. Any dispassionate observer will to agree here with Sri Aurobindo. To give an instance, I shall quote a passage from the great realist-idealist Lowes Dickenson's *Justice and Liberty*:

"Nietzsche's strong man is not a mere ideal; he is a fact . . . . For it is Power, not wealth or comfort, at which they aim; and in pursuit of that aim they trample under foot all law and all morality. . . . Power being their ideal, they are most conscious of having achieved it when the resistance over which they triumphed has been most vigorous; and what provokes resistance more determined than the prospect of *spoliation*, ruin and death? The more, therefore, the victims suffer, the more the 'Overman' rejoices, for the more conscious he is of being strong; and in that sense of strength lies his whole satisfaction in life."

Nietzsche's Overman is synonymous with Russell's Dictator, Sri Aurobindo's Titan and Sri Krishna's Asura. In other words, though each of these has a different outlook on the world, they all diagnose the same type of evil and its dreadful tendency. Studying this type, we realise that the time-old lust in humanity for dominating others is as difficult to eradicate from human nature as it is deleterious to the nature itself. When I first came to the Ashram, I well remember how I walked its grounds with jaunty steps with this complacent idea that I was, with all my faults and failings, a good man. I saw certain wrong movements in me—happily, more blemishes in others—but though I wanted sincerely to get rid of them, I never thought that their expulsion was a matter of any immediate urgency. In a word, I was far from surmising that I had such a tremendous leeway to make up or, to put it in the Yogic terminology, that I would have to "transform my nature" step by step, resolutely, patiently, ly, ruthlessly and lastly, alas, despondently because it was going to be such an uphill task. I was yet to be put wise to the difficulties of Yoga or, rather, to the hurdles the Yogis had to cross in the past. The actual difficulties which I had to encounter in my day to day *sadhana* of the Ashram life turned out to be very different, indeed, from those I had imagined and been forewarned against by the worldly-wise. When I came to the Ashram in my exalted mood I thought that I would only have, in the first place, to undergo heroic austerities and, in the second, to meditate for hours and hours. The first prospect goaded the social climber in me to become even more alive if not kicking, while the second made me simply glow with pride as I said to myself with the great poet A.E.:

> *Pure at heart we wander now.*
> *We have hopes beyond today*
> *And our quest does not allow*
> *Rest or dreams along the way.*

The first fly that I discovered in the ointment of my self-esteem was when I found that I did not like it at all whenever any of those who used to obey my will declined to bow down to my wisdom in which I lived and moved and grew progressively: my growing wisdom made my egoism grow too. I had thought that it must work the other way: that my egoism should dwindle in proportion as my Yogic wisdom and insight deepened. This, naturally, disconcerted me, but that in itself would not have been so serious had I not noted, at the same time, that my discomfiture was often enough attended with a secret chafing at the Guru's will bearing mine down. This is not an autobiography, so I cannot possibly enlarge on such experiences. Suffice it to say, therefore, that I came to realise slowly but inescapably that the Asura of whom I had heard so much was not a mythical figure with a multitude of heads and hands but a real resident and cherished guest housed only too willingly by each one of us. Only some cherished him more, some less, that is all. I saw, for instance, that whenever any vital hunger in me was underfed, he got progressively restive till even the social trappings of decency became hard to retain to cover his naked ugliness. Years later, I read a citation from the great mystic William Law the purport of which is that none can turn towards God without turning his back upon his ego, because none can be fully alive to God till he completely dies to his lower nature.

But I must pause here a little to stress an experience of mine which grew from day to day till I could not deny its vivid, concrete reality. I refer to what Gurudev called the "hostile forces". I had, indeed, read about the Buddha's *Mara*, heard about the Christian Devil and speculated in my fanciful way about ghosts and spirits and monsters which figured in the Tantric writings of certain schools. But having always been exceedingly normal and strong with no "weird experiences" to boast (much though I longed to) I could never take such disembodied entities seriously. What I mean is that though I did not exactly pooh-pooh all such stories as old wives' tales, I never imagined that there could really be in action queer forces such as these wherewith a twentieth-century spiritual seeker might have to reckon in dull earnest on his way to the Divine.

I never saw any spirits not to mention the Devil, nor did I ever feel any eerie presences, (Paul Valerie called these "*les choses absentes*") which left me an aftermath of jittery fears. I did indeed hear from my friends about such macabre things which loomed and waylaid good Samaritans. Also I came to witness quite a few sudden unaccountable happenings which terrified the percipients, sometimes even disabling them temporarily. But, for all that, I could never persuade myself that these might ever be concrete impediments on *my* way, far less make *my* mind "go off its handle" as I put it flippantly.

Nevertheless (and here is my point) I had to take cognizance time and again—not indeed of their actual presences, but of the heritage of diffidence and depression they bequeathed, a legacy too heavy to be dismissed nonchalantly. And, to make confusion worse confounded, they bred their microbes so fast that before I could pronounce Jack Robinson they would have me "translated like Bottom" from a rational optimist into a ne'er-do-well. I know, here I am unlikely to be convincing, the less so as I cannot hope to *prove* my point to those who have not experienced what I have. Notwithstanding, I must still testify to what I have felt again and again, namely, that we can never insulate ourselves completely from forces which encircle us except with the help of the powers which can as concretely shield us as others can attack. To give a typical instance:

I want something from Gurudev—some support in some matter. It so happens that he declines to come forward to oblige me. My self-love gets hurt and then, lo! the magic button is pressed and where it was all a laughing garden a moment ago—with hopes dancing like flowers, certitudes glowing like sunbeams and aspirations soaring like birds, one sees only doubts blasting like poison-fumes, chafings irrational like thorns and a sentimental revolt that gesticulates like a demon deprived of his mask. Time and again did this happen to me and, often enough, just when on top of the weather, there, out of a clear sky, a wrong suggestion dropped into me and then bang came the show-down. I know full well how difficult it is to bring home to others the concrete vividness of such experiences, the more so because if and when they come to us in ordinary life, the depressions do not assail as they do here—with the veritable downrush of a deluge or the storm-hurtle of an avalanche. The reason is that in ordinary life these hostile forces do not need to be as active or organised as they are in Yoga—their *metier* being to thwart all Godward endeavours, and in ordinary life people are seldom concentrated on such a task. But when the God-seeker wants to clamber or soar upward, these phalanx themselves quickly in their rebel alarm to be able to act as a sort of earth-pull or wing-clipper, or, to give another simile, when you float with the tides, all the waves befriend you and carry you on their jubilant crests, but just turn back to swim against them and you will know swiftly what is what! This image seemed to me more apposite especially when I swam against the current and felt all but suffocated by the buffets of the waves. I was reminded of this when, years later, a nonplussed pupil of mine, Indira, said that so long as she had not wanted the Divine the world had been very kind and obliging, and appreciative, but that it all changed radically the moment she turned to Yoga for God. I told her what I had realised years ago, that it *had* to be always more or less like that.

"*Had* to be? Why?" she asked, still at sea.

"Because", I answered after I had recounted to her briefly what I myself had gone through, "Yoga means transcending *Prakriti* or the forces of Nature, which flow all around us like the waves. So long as you are in the swim, acquiescing in these, you will be automatically upheld and carried forward by them. But since the Yoga wants to wean you from them they, very naturally, resent your defection and outlaw you as a deserter. You can't expect the services of those you don't propose to oblige by offering concessions. And when, moreover, you want to expel them out of your very being which has been their habitat for years and years, won't they get furious and attack from sheer fear of becoming homeless refugees?"

This in itself would not have been so cataclysmic, if I may exploit such a purple word, had not these forces of Nature found the too-willing support of the hostile forces which are sworn to oppose God-seekers everywhere. That is why all spiritual guides have emphasised the urgent need of purifying our emotions so that we may, at every cross-road, side always with the right ones as against the wrong. To put it succinctly, we must not allow these adverse forces any loophole or handle by sympathising with what we are, alas, too apt to call *natural*. This may sound easy in theory but it is quite an uphill task in practice, as I found to my bitter cost, and the more I realised this the more grateful I felt towards Gurudev for his unfailing help and guidance showing me, indefatigably, where and how I had swerved from the right attitude as a result of which these forces, thanks to my lapses, could creep in imperceptibly through the breaches. It was primarily his insistence on the right attitude which helped me evict the wrong ones in spite of their masterly pleadings for what we call our *human* ways and *natural* reactions.

But this is known to all Yogis. I have no wish to write a manual of Yoga. I have referred to this only to underline, first, the help and encouragement Gurudev always gave us whenever we erred or slipped; secondly, the security of protection he extended to us whenever we felt depressed or diffident; and lastly, the invaluable guidance he gave us by acting as an eye-opener to us all, showing laboriously the cause of the minutest of our backslidings. None who has not been through such ordeals can ever fully appraise the concrete help that comes along with the guiding voice of the Pilot. Indeed, the feeling of reassurance, *abhoy*, cannot be described—it has to be experienced; but a sample of the nature of the guidance he gave on such occassions I may adduce here which will explain itself. After one such attack he wrote to me:

"The hostile forces exist and have been known to yogic experience ever since the days of the Vedas and Zoroaster in Asia (and the mysteries of Egypt and Cabbala) and in Europe also from old times. These things of course cannot be felt or known so long as one lives in the ordinary mind and its ideas and perceptions; for these there are only two categories of influences recognisable: the ideas and feelings and actions of oneself and others and the play of environment and physical forces; but once one begins to get the inner view of things, it is different. One begins to experience that all is an action of forces of *Prakriti*, psychological as well as physical which play upon our nature and these are conscious forces or are supported by a consciousness or consciousnesses behind. One is in the midst of a big universal working and it is impossible any longer to explain everything as the result of one's own and sole personality. You yourself have at one time written that your crises of despair etc. came upon you as if *thrown* on you and worked themselves out without your being able to determine or put an end to them. That means an action of universal forces and not merely an independent action of your personality though it is something in your nature of which they make use. But you are not conscious, and others also, of this intervention and pressure as its source, for the reason I state. Those in the Ashram who have developed the inner view of things on the vital plane have plenty of experience of the hostile forces. However, you need not personally concern yourself with them so long as they remain incognito. . . . One may have the experiences on the mental plane without this knowledge coming—for there mind and idea predominate and one does not feel the play of Forces—it is only in the vital that this becomes clear. In the mind plane they manifest at most as mental suggestions and not as concrete powers. Also, if one looks at things with the mind only (even though it be the inner mind) one may see the subtle play of Nature-forces but without recognising the conscious intention which we call hostile."

But Knowledge, too, has its disadvantages—as I was to discover soon enough—especially when it leads one to glimpse the world of occult forces, however fugitively. To give a typical instance, in my pre-yogic days, whenever I flirted with a wrong suggestion I never dreamt of its virus being cultured somewhere outside to be injected subsequently into my mind. But with the passage of time I did perceive a fissure in my own being: I could see, with progressive clarity, that what I had hitherto looked upon as an indivisible part of my personality was, in reality, a conglomerate of a variety of disparate influences. This generated in me a deep uneasiness: whither was I going? Why all this fuss in my own being about my own self—these rifts and interstices and what not? But the trouble was that nothing I could do at the time seemed capable of undoing what had been done. It was as though —to use a simile contrariwise—a drop of curd had been thrown into a bowl of milk whereafter the disintegration of the milk could not be reversed. A ray of light had come to stay in my consciousness and it had thereafter to work as a leaven. The result—I could not recapture my unflawed self-assurance of the pre-yogic days that I was, indeed, what I took myself to be. This made me desolate as the new knowledge irretrievably had soured the sweet milk of self-complacency. I struggled in vain to have it restored. For do what I would, I simply could not revert to what I had been converted from. For instance, I could now see clearly that whenever I toyed with a wrong suggestion, some part of me was glad while another part was unhappy resenting it as an intrusion. What made me unhappier still was that I became more and more conscious, as days passed, of a wilful encouragement somewhere. But as this made me feel disloyal to my Guru, I tried in my clever(?) way to rationalise it into legitimacy. "Oh, keep an open mind, don't you know," a part of me said to myself coaxingly. "Don't you invite blindness, my boy! Why must you accept everything you are told as gospel truth? Watch, weigh and sift all the time: never surrender your native inviolable right to be a judge of your own reactions. If an idea is burgeoning within you, do not show it the door in this off-hand manner because somebody commands you to. Remember that you have an inalienable right to your own ideas, you cannot possibly grow to your ultimate stature without their fortifying light. Everything that happens can push you forward, you know, provided you accept its aid in the right spirit. And, dash it all, isn't your individuality the most precious part of your integral self? How then can you—to whom freedom of judgment is like the breath of life—possibly will yourself into blind slavery instead of aspiring to be the architect of your destiny? . . . and so on and on—endless variations on the one theme: do not surrender your self-will.

As the days went by, I became progressively conscious of the fallacy of such specious reasoning till, in the end, I saw, like St. Augustine of yore, that it was not freedom I ached for but licence. I saw that my higher self was not only willing but eager to surrender to Gurudev's will because it could well do without this so-called freedom to follow the ego's unruly cravings and subtle promptings. The trouble arose, as I came to realise, because my lower nature did not want to waive its native right to its unlovely enjoyments.

But my lower nature, like Goldsmith's famous schoolmaster, "though vanquished argued still," resisting transformation till, as last, matters were brought to a head, and thus decided for me, by a horrible experience of a friend and brother disciple, P. He used to be, in those days, a neighbour of mine and as he did not know English very well, I used to write for him to Sri Aurobindo about his experiences. And he had had wonderful experiences to his credit—seen marvellous visions, heard thrilling voices, savoured exquisite delights—in short, had already "drunk deep at the Pierian spring" of the Spirit. And yet his lower nature, which had survived, would still drag him back to his old pleasure-haunts, as he used to tell me in those days with bitter regrets.* "I do want to come here and stay permanently", he would tell me off and on, "but alas, I cannot even stay here a couple of months at a stretch. I get restive and peaceless," and so on. His long tale of woes staggered me as, in those days, I was still a novitiate in Yoga and had only just begun to step across the border of ordinary consciousness. So, I could not account at all for his restlessness after the tremendous harvest he had reaped in the field of spiritual experiences till, on that unforgettable day, when he came running to me in the afternoon and told me, completely unnerved, what he had just seen with open eyes. He spoke, in Hindi mixed with Bengali:

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* He gave up these pleasures later on, a change which amounted, in his case, to a feat and so impressed all his friends including myself.

"I was praying to Gurudev, you know," he said, "for strength to be able to make a long stay here when I saw an ugly little brat of the colour of coal tar—a stinking, stunted mannikin—come out of my body and beg before me: 'Oh, give me something! You have enough to live on but I am starving!' And he fell at my feet crying, Dilip—just fancy that!! Oh, I shall never sleep again thinking of this nightmare!" And so he wailed on, in dire straits.

It was indeed hair-raising, as I wrote to Gurudev, who wrote back to P (I read out the letter to him) that the ugly little brat was an exteriorisation of his lower-vital being of lust and concupiscence and possessiveness. "Do you understand now," he wrote, "why you are not allowed to stay here? It is this formation of your life in the past. He wants food which is wholly denied here. That is why you have to depart again and again. Your lower vital being is still too much alive and kicking to let you stay here and, till he changes radically, I fear this see-saw in your nature is likely to continue."

But, to my sorrow, I found, as soon as I reviewed it in retrospect, that my personality had not one but many gates and as many masked gate-keepers, so that even when Vigilance, the chief porter, was wide-awake at the main entrance, some other factotum could and often did open the back-door. So it happened, again and again, that the hostile suggestion or impulse did get admitted in spite of my resolution to shut it out. To put it differently, the more I watched myself the more I was reminded of Pope's *Essay on Man*:

> *Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,*
> *Aspiring to be angels, men rebel.*

And, we do not merely rebel, but also refuse to learn from our past mistakes, insist on our right to plead for our folly with the wisest of reasonings and, lastly—to quote from Gurudev's letter to me—resist *"the change from the human to the divine consciousness"* in order to be able to defend our "right to sorrow and suffering". I was reminded time and again of Sri Ramakrishna's simile about the camel which even when its mouth bled from munching "prickly grass" would persist in munching the same thorns and no other. In other words, I insisted, as Gurudev pointed out in a long letter, *"on the Divine becoming human and remaining in the human consciousness"* and withal protested *"against any attempt to make the human divine"*.

And that is why this "bleeding piece of earth", human nature, has bled stanchlessly since the dawn of time and God on high has to wait on, in seeming helplessness till the blood shed may come to fertilise the life of the common man, because unless that happens, the flawless flowering cannot come about and the groping aspirant must remain what he is, a puppet of Destiny (SAVITRI VI: II):

A seeker in a dark and obscure place,
An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,
An ignorant judge of problems Ignorance made.

CHAPTER VII

GURU, THE TRANSFORMER

THE more I brooded over man's utter helplessness when he is at odds with his own *human* nature, the less hopeful I felt about my prospective ability to make good in such a difficult undertaking as Yoga, that is, to effect a junction with the Divine Grace to be able to surmount Destiny. At such times, I bitterly complained to Gurudev:

why, oh, why had he dragged me to such a path. . . . But since the milk was spilt, alas, the sooner I was allowed to graze on other fields the better for all . . . I must not waste his time any more . . . no wonder he had been growing cold and so on and so forth.

But if Dilip was Dilip, Gurudev also was Gurudev: so he wrote back to me as tenderly as ever: "You need not think that anything can alter our attitude towards you. That which is extended to you is not a vital human love which can be altered by external things: it remains and persistently we shall try to help you up and lead you towards the Light."

But I stayed unconvinced and wrote back again insisting that I had possibly bitten off more than I could chew. "I send you a poem entitled, *In the Thrall of Gloom (Tamisrai)* because I see no way out: you cannot possibly leave your ivory tower of aloof contemplation to come to the help of the likes of us. Probably you find the earth a little too troublesome and distracting. Anyway, you, in your cloistered seclusion, are too far away from us mortals to be hailed as a real helper, still less a kin or a friend. Only I do wonder why you must go on advertising holy heaven as the next-door neighbour to our awful earth, repeating *ad nauseum* that Love Divine can be induced to flower on the soil of our undivine earth and make it a peer of paradise in the foreseeable future! Really, master mine, you are nothing if not bafling, since this Divine Love of yours does look like something to swear by—not something to lean on! But as I do not claim that my findings are right, I shall wait till I have some *clarification* on this point, to use a banal political word in a blissful spiritual context, which, I trust, will be deemed pardonable.

"I will conclude with a few words about my poem *Tamisrai*. I had first thought of not sending it up to you because as I read it now, I feel that it seems, somehow, to give the lie to my present mood which is one of unrelieved gloom and pessimism. Is that sincerity, or may

I venture to defend myself with the plea that something in me, deep down at the bottom of the abyss, seems determined not to admit defeat even when the gloom is impenetrable? In other words, as my aspiration here—or; prayer if you like—is for strength and courage and the will to win through to the Light at the far end of the tunnel, so I find myself refusing to be vanquished, bent on plodding on till the gloom silvers into gleam. That is the poem—which says that one can be optimistic enough while the going is easy, but it is only when darkness seems endless and all-powerful, when you traverse wearily a mocking desert or an alien wilderness that your faith in and loyalty to the memory of Light is tested."

To that he wrote back:

"I objected in a former letter not to aspiration but to a demand to make peace or joy or Ananda a condition for following the Yoga. And it is undesirable because if you do so, then the vital takes the lead and then unrest, despondency, unhappiness can always come, since these things are the very nature of the vital—the vital can never remain constantly in joy and peace, for it needs their opposites in order to have the sense of the drama of life. And yet when unrest and unhappiness come, the vital at once cries: 'I am not given my due, what is the use of my doing Yoga?' Or else, it makes a gospel of its unhappiness and says that the path to fulfilment must be a tragic road through the desert. And yet, it is precisely this preponderance of the vital in us that makes the necessity of passing through the desert. If the psychic were always there in the front, the desert would be no longer a desert and the wilderness would blossom with roses." And he went on to add:

"I think the best thing I can write to you in the circumstances is to recommend to you Nolini's aphorism: 'Depression need not be depressing; rather it should be made a jumping-board for the leap to a higher poise'. The rule in Yoga is not to let the depression depress you, to stand back from it, observe its cause and remove the cause; for the cause is always in oneself, perhaps a vital defect somewhere, a wrong movement indulged or a petty desire causing a recoil, sometimes by its satisfaction, sometimes by its disappointment.

"If the Mother and I want you to progress and to accept the divine love we give you, it is for your own sake and precisely because in that love there is constant peace and joy and adoration and causeless sorrow of this kind will disappear altogether. Our love is there for you and has always been there. I cannot believe that you will reject it. For God's sake throw aside these misunderstandings and these movements, recover your true self and face out firmly, with the Mother's help and mine, the difficulties of the Yoga.

"Your poem entitled 'In Darkness' is a very moving one, delicate, true and beautiful in every line."

On another occasion, however, I was not so brave, when I discovered, to my utter humiliation, that it was not that I could not change but that I would not. "This," I wrote to him, "makes me feel convinced that I am a misfit here, that I am, as Tagore said to me once, an artist first and last—not a Yogi. But the trouble is, Guru, that though I loved art passionately once upon a time, I failed to find it satisfying. Besides, I believed sincerely that if I wanted the Divine, He would make it possible for me to climb up to Him however hard and steep the path may prove: in other words, He would help me to change. But alas, I find that He is anything but responsive, or, maybe He would rather have me try my luck elsewhere, who knows? So, perhaps I had better give up such a hopeless endeavour and try something more practicable. Why not allow me to—say, court prison patriotically as Subhas and Jawaharlalji are doing? For you must admit at least that I am not very receptive to your helping Force, which shows (does it not?) that I am essentially unfit for your Yoga which aims at making us non-human?

"Besides", I wrote in a sudden revulsion from self-pity, "you will have to concede, Guru, that I did not come here an utter failure, frustrated by life, a useless floatsam, stranded by tides of circumstances on the shoals of your Yoga. I was wanted by a great many, admired by a good many and am wanted still by so many. I had money, gifts, health and a social standing and then I could have founded a Musical Academy and developed my own new style of music and flowered into a poet too—not altogether a wretched life you will admit." And so I ranted on in my impetuous folly and concluded thus: "Why then did your Supramental Divine uproot me from my native soil if He wanted only to disqualify me finally as a Yogi?" But he did not give me a rating or pull me down to pieces. He descended to my level and answered my charges one by one with the deep understanding and superhuman patience of which he alone was capable.

"Dilip," he wrote, "even if things were as bad as you say, I don't see how going away would help you . . . . some have tried before—this device of progress by departure but it has never succeeded, they have had to come back and face their difficulty. Your other suggestion (of courting prison patriotically) is even more irrational: what you propose would not happen and the only result would be hard labour or detention which would be both unpleasant and unprofitable to you and useless to the country. Why do you always come back to this notion of going away or entertain it at all? It is quite meaningless from any rational point of view; it only encourages the adverse Forces which want to take you away from the path, to return to the attack, and it prevents the speedy conversion of that dissatisfied part of your vital which is always kicking against the pricks—the pricks of your soul and of your spiritual destiny. However sad the prospect may seem to this dissatisfied vital fragment, *your destiny is to be a Yogi* and the sooner it reconciles itself to the prospect the better for it and for all the other personalities in you. Your alleged or inferred unfitness is a delusion, an imagination of the vital part; it doesn't exist. If persistence of difficulties be a proof of unfitness, then there is nobody in this

Ashram who is fit for the Yoga. We would have to pack up our belongings or give them away and start either to get back to the ordinary world or en route for the Himalayas.

"You describe the rich human egoistic life you might have lived and you say 'not altogether a wretched life, you will admit'. On paper it sounds even very glowing and satisfactory, as you describe it. But there is no real or final satisfaction in it, except for those who are too common or trivial to seek anything else, and even they are not really satisfied or happy and, in the end, it tires and palls. Sorrow and illness, clash and strife, disappointment, disillusionment and all kinds of human suffering come and beat its glow to pieces and then decay and death. That is the vital egoistic life as man has found it throughout the ages, and yet is it that which this part of your vital regrets? How do you fail to see, when you lay so much stress on the desirability of a merely human consciousness, that suffering is its badge? When the vital resists the change from the human into the divine consciousness, what it is defending is its right to sorrow and suffering and all the rest of it, varied and relieved no doubt by some vital and mental pleasures and satisfactions, but very partially relieved by them and only for a time. In your own case, it was already beginning to pall on you and that was why you turned from it. No doubt, there were the joys of the intellect and of artistic creation, but a man cannot be an artist alone; there is the outer, quite human, lower vital part and, in all but a few, it is the most clamourous and insistent part. But what was dissatisfied in you? It was the soul within, first of all, and through it the higher mind and the higher vital. Why then find fault with the Divine for misleading you when it turned you to the Yoga or brought you here? It was simply answering to the demand of your inner being and the higher parts of your nature. If you have so much difficulty and become restless, it is because you are still divided and something in your lower vital still regrets what it has lost, or, as a price for its adhesion or a compensation—price to be *immediately* paid down to it—asks for something similar and equivalent in the spiritual life. It refuses to believe that there is a greater compensation, a larger vital life waiting for it, something positive in which there shall not be the old inadequacy and unrest and final dissatisfaction. The foolishness is not in the Divine guidance, but in the irrational and obstinate resistance of this confused and obscure part of you to the demand, made not only by this Yoga, but by all Yogas—to the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of your aspiration of your own soul and higher nature."

Then after giving a summary review of the past Yogas which would be too long to quote he pointed out the foolish inconsistencies of the human vital and wrote: "I know that this is the natural inconsistency of the human vital mind wanting two incompatible things together; but that is why it is necessary to transform the human and put something a little more luminous in its place."*

I must pause here and point out that during those early years of our *sadhana* we often expressed our misgivings about his "thesis of the Supramental", as we called it. I often wrote to him (half in jest, no doubt, but the other half clung impenitently to its scepticism) that the Supramental seemed too good to be true. Once I wrote to him what Chadwick remarked casually about the Supramental: "Sri Aurobindo takes one's breath away, Dilip! Will it, can it, really happen?" I often conveyed to Gurudev such titbits to draw him out if I could and, as I generally succeeded, I grew bolder and went the length of equating the Supramental with something grim and withering like a ruthless Dictator out to do good but with a devastating velocity, riding roughshod over all our cherished ideals of a sweet and liberal living and perhaps making us despise this beautiful earth as an utterly unsuitable place for its Kingdom of thunder and lightning.

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* The entire letter has been published in *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* 2nd series in Section XI, entitled "Difficulties of Transformation"

He must have smiled indulgently when he commented on my flings and, coming down to my level once again, ran full tilt into me:

"It is curious that you admit your ignorance of what the Supramental can be, and yet in these moods you not only pronounce categorically what it is like, but reject emphatically my experience about it as of no practical validity or not valid for anybody but myself! I have not insisted, I have answered only casually because I am not asking you now to be non-human and divine much less to be supramental; but as you are always returning to this point when you have these attacks and making it the pivot—or at least a main support—of your depression, I am obliged to answer. The Supramental is not grand, aloof, cold and austere; it is not something opposed to or inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, *because it was so revealed to me and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence.* I am concerned with the earth and not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental Yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object. The Supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter. One has indeed to rise to high summits to reach it, but the more one rises, the more can one bring down below. No doubt, life and body have not to remain the ignorant, imperfect, impotent things they are now; but why should a change to a fuller life-power, a fuller body-power be considered something aloof, cold and undesirable? The utmost *ananda* the body and life are now capable of is a brief excitement of the vital mind or the nerves or the cells which is limited, imperfect and soon passes; with the supramental change all the cells, nerves, vital forces, embodied mental forces can become filled with a thousand-fold *ananda*, capable of an intensity of bliss which passes description and which need not fade away. How aloof, repellent and undesirable! The Supramental love means an intense unity of soul with soul, mind with mind, life with life, and an entire flooding of the body-consciousness with the physical experience of oneness, the presence of the Beloved in every part, in every cell of the body. Is that too something aloof and grand and undesirable? With the supramental change, the very thing on which you insist, the possibility of the free physical meeting of the embodied Divine with the *sadhaka* without conflict of forces and without undesirable reactions becomes possible, assured and free. That too is, I suppose, something aloof and undesirable? I could go on—for pages, but this is enough for the moment."

Which brings me right to the heart of the problem of transformation of our nature into what it aspires to be and yet refuses to accept when it has, perforce, to put its shoulder to the wheel. It acts in this anomalous way because it is driven by diverse forces warring in its own territory for mastery, because it has, as it were, wheels within wheels. But here I will have to revert to my past to be intelligible—the more so as I myself found it not a little difficult to understand what was expected of us as well as what they, our guides, were up against in their *sadhana*.

When one puts it in words simply, as an abstract thesis, it sounds indeed feasible and laudable enough to be attempted. Has it not been claimed by all the great seers, mystics and prophets down the ages that our intellect can be a help only if it agrees to serve the spirit—that it is a good orderly but a bad commandant? Or to put it in the deeper accent of the great Seer:

> *The intellect is not all; a guide within*
> *Awaits our question; He it was informed*
> *The reason, He surpasses; and unformed*
> *Presages of His mightiness begin.**

True Yogis have unanimously claimed, however, that these "presages" cannot become clear messages to help us slay the darkness unless and until either the mind is stilled or reason taught its place in the scheme of things. I had once an interesting talk with the saint, Sri Ramdas, in his Ashram. He related to me the following incident:

He was then living on the top of a hill, in a small hut when, one evening, an intellectual friend sought him out. He had a great many questions seething in his mind, he said, to which he could find no satisfactory answers. Ramdas was scared stiff since he had never cared for those who love to cross-examine from the dais witnesses who stand in the dock deposing for the Divine. So he put off the discussion somehow and retired for the night. But as the ghost had only been warded off for the nonce, not laid, he had to appeal to his one Extricator, Ram. To his amazement, in the dead of night Ram Himself formulated questions and answered them back, point by point, of which he kept a record. Next morning he showed these to his intellectual friend who found it all but incredible: the very questions he wanted to ask had been answered by Ram, the questions which he had not even hinted at to Ramdas.

These questions, with the answers, are given by Ramdas in his book, *At the Feet of God*. I shall only select a few from the sheaf:

Question: What is the result of self-surrender?
Answer: Everlasting bliss.
Question: How?

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* Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's poem "In the Moonlight".

Answer: When the human will is given up for the Divine Will, all the responsibility of the instrument, the devotee, ceases and the consciousness of the individual ego is merged in the Divine consciousness. Then all his actions, thoughts and words emanate from the Divine source, leaving him entirely free from all doubts, desires and bonds. . . .

Question: How is it you allow your child's mind to wander?

Answer: All, all is myself, O child! Wherever your mind wanders, it wanders in me and rests in me. . . . You cannot reason why it is so; but is the one great Truth. You cannot comprehend it, but you can realise it.

Question: Why should Ramdas not comprehend it?

Answer: Because it is a thing beyond the range of the intellect.

Question: Then explain, why should there be an intellect at all and what are its functions?

Answer: The intellect exists only to help you know that you do not know anything.

I have intentionally laboured this point as I found myself very reluctant to accept in practice, if not in theory, the mystic's position that the intellect could help us best by exposing its untenable pretentions. My own upbringing has been—like that of most of my "educated friends" —an intellectual one, in the main. I do not mean that I could have lived cheek by jowl with them accepting all their hypotheses. (I should never have left them and turned to the mystic lead of Yoga had I regarded Reason as the last arbiter of Truth and ultimate wisdom.) But I do mean that I had come to believe that our intellect, grounded in sense-perception, had, in the last resort, the right to adjudicate on what we call *things of the spirit*. Sri Aurobindo, in unison with the other great gnostics, repudiated this claim out of hand, which made me suffer in practice even though I had from the start acquiesced, in theory, in their nonconformist aloofness from the Church of the Intellect. I did not fully understand why

I made such a to-do when I had to translate in practice what I had admitted so willingly in theory, till one day, when I asked Mother, she told me with her smile of sympathy, that those who live in the intellect cherish their intellectual preconceptions as they cherish their limbs, so that a blow on their darling ideas about right and wrong makes them literally wince as a blow on the body. The mystery became clear to me in a flash. But I felt a pang in my heart at the prospect of being forced now, once and for all, to part company with my intellectual postulates even when I came to be persuaded now that they were but phantom glimmers of make-believe not steadfast beacons when the storm is abroad. Again and again I quoted with sad approval Milton's famous jeremiad:

"For who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being?"

And the pain, alas, brought in its train my old monitor and sentinel, Doubt who, keen as a spear, stabbed me with bitter reproach for having forced its dear Lord, Mind, to pay such an exorbitant tax to idolatry. I wrote to Gurudev innumerable letters asking him how to wheedle this sceptic into believing when it only ached to probe, weigh and, lastly, hold suspect everything that defied its scrutiny. He wrote a long letter on doubt in which he opened his indictment of doubt with:

"I have started writing about doubt, but even in doing so I am afflicted by the 'doubt' whether any amount of writing or of anything else can persuade the eternal doubt in man which is the penalty of his native ignorance. In the first place, to write adequately would mean anything from sixty to six hundred pages, but not even six thousand pages would convince Doubt."

And, indeed, his letter gave me at best a consolation, not comfort—so, the prospect appeared far from heartening, for his contention amounted, in the last analysis, to an exhortation to change. I must indeed change, I agreed sadly, and throw clean overboard the compass of the intellect. His stinging sarcasm at the end of his letter hit the target:

"I would ask one simple question of those who would make the intellectual mind the standard and judge of spiritual experience. Is the Divine something less than Mind or is He something greater? Is mental consciousness with its groping enquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status? If it is greater, then there is no reason to seek after the Divine. If it is equal, then spiritual experience is quite superfluous. But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or a witness before its tribunal, summon it to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin it down like an insect under its examining microscope?"

I have said that his exhortation gave me only consolation, not comfort because although I could honestly say that I had accepted from the start the mystic's position that the Divine was not to be sounded with the mental plummet, I could not say, with an equal honesty, that till a superior plummet came within my reach, I would gladly do without what equipment I had. I had, indeed, found our mental ideas and intellectual conceptions to be inadequate direction-posts in that they never succeeded in leading us out of the wood. But I had also expected that I would have such apocalyptic visions of Truth as would make the little lights of mind pale into insignificance which, alas, did not happen in the spectacular manner I had imagined! The result: I moped and brooded, asked and doubted, complained and whimpered till at last I arraigned the Divine for not playing the game, for leaving me, in fact, in a deeper quandary than his predecessor, Intellect, the false prophet had, and so, the only solace left to Dilip was to blame the whole thing on the Guru.

I have put it somewhat crudely, but I do not think I have drawn a false picture of the quandary in which we—or at least a good many of us—found ourselves.

But of course this was by no means the whole story. On the positive side we gained a good deal not only in terms of joy and day-to-day assurance that we were being sustained by and through the Guru we had accepted, but also in terms of those concretely assessable dividends of faith and strength out of the investment of even our somewhat crude obedience and inchoate loyalty. As the days glided by, and hurdles of the ego we had to cross increased, we came to realise more and more, to our shame and sorrow, how crude and unsatisfactory had been our self-giving. One feature of this deepening realisation I may well refer to, as a mouthpiece again of the rest, to wit, that even when, in my moments of depression, I underrated the spiritual value of the dividends that accrued to me, I grew progressively conscious of the utter inadequacy of my total investments. What was it after all that I had invested, I came to ask myself in my tranquil moments? A will undermined with vacillations; a faith riddled with doubts; a pledge to obedience equipped with all sorts of safety valves to let out waste fumes of reluctance; an undertaking of loyalty so flawed as to desert its post again and again even though there was little hope of relief in the offing and, lastly, a love that bargained all along the line and baulked at surrender of its cherished self-will knowing full well—in the words of A.E.—that

We must rise or we must fall
Love can know no middle way
If the great life do not call,
There is sadness and decay.

Yet how often have I not looked before and after and pined for the "pinnacle of plentitude" while refusing, in my blindness, the uplifting Light of Love every time it came down to help me climb the ascent following the call of the greater life!

I do not intend to convey that in this struggle there was no difference between one *sadhaka* and another. For although, I confess, I was at every step discovering anew that I was almost constitutionally incapable of aligning myself with those who would take everything on trust, at the same time I could not doubt but that there were among us a good many whose attitude was more correct, faith better grounded and insight into Yogic happenings appreciably deeper than mine. I was, indeed, critical and sometimes resentful, but not, I believe, undiscerning or unfair. So, I was genuinely impressed by many an individual instance of loyalty, sincerity, humility and, above all, hard ungrudging labour undertaken with no other motive than that of pleasing the Guru. I could see that they comported themselves as they did because they had accepted the *nishkama karma* of the Gita, fully conscious of the hurdles they would have to negotiate to translate the ideal into practice; for otherwise, human nature being what it is, it would have been humanly impossible for them to have gone on so bravely as they did with the dull routine of unremitting work which could hardly have been congenial to any of us.

And last, though not least, I must stress here one point which outsiders often lose sight of when they pronounce unkind verdicts on our *sadhana*. It is that although I admit, with due remorse, that many of us, including myself, often failed to fulfil even some of the major conditions without which no real transformation of the basic human impulses could be initiated, I cannot admit the right of any outsider to adjudicate on our net achievements, individual or collective, unless and until he himself faces up to what we were struggling against.

Which reminds me—let me add, parenthetically—of a remark of Tagore's about human judgements in general. He said, in his inimitable vein of irony: "Scientists, technicians, philosophers and skilled workers of various denominations, Dilip, are more fortunate than us, artists, in that Messrs. Everybody and Know-all will not dare brand *their* work off-hand with stigma: but just look, how quick he is to make up his mind whether *our* creative work is to be passed or damned!" Years later when I met him, I reminded him of his remark and added: "But sir, you ought to have classed us, Yogis, too, with you."

He understood and smiled.

"But then," he asked, "they don't see *your* work and *sadhana* as they see *ours*. So how can they judge?"

"By just dismissing as moonshine what they don't see."

And how he laughed!

But I did not say this in mere jest. For I have seen many a critic actually pontificating complacently about what we were doing or leaving undone. To give just one instance.

An English friend of mine came to visit me. He was a well-known journalist and did not belong to that blatant type which, as Aldoux Huxley puts it, comes to India first, to air his superiority and lastly, to have a good time. My friend was, in his own way, a thoughtful man and had a certain respect for India's wisdom. But although not quite self-complacent by nature, he had come to take it for granted that the Western outlook on life was essentially healthier and sounder than that of "the Oriental quietists", as he dubbed us, superiorly. I showed him round the Ashram. He appreciated much of what he saw. Nevertheless he stayed persuaded that we were too static, aloof and out-of-the-swim to be able to "act on the world". "And if you don't propose to act on the world," he asked me with an edge to his voice, "how do you think the world is going to be changed—reformed?".

I made what reply I could to reassure him—quoting from Sri Aurobindo's *Renaissance of India*: "By spirituality we do not mean a remote metaphysical mind or the tendency to dream rather than act," because "to realise intimately truth of the spirit and to quicken and remould life by it" was the aim of *his* Yoga; but though he gave me a patient hearing, he remained unconvinced. Neither did I see how I was to bring home to his somewhat rigid, one-track mind the fact that he could not fully realise what we were up against: the inertia of the ego harnessed to the rebelliousness of our self-will. Still I endeavoured to explain to him, as best I could, why I had to repudiate the call of the world of clamorous and personal ambition. I quoted for his benefit a message of Gurudev's: "*The liberated man has no personal hopes; he does not seize on things as his personal possessions; he receives what the Divine Will brings him, covets nothing, is jealous of none; what comes to him he takes without repulsion and without attachment; what goes from him he allows to depart into the whirl of things without repining or grief or sense of loss. His heart and self are under perfect control; they are free from reaction and passion, they make no turbulent response to the touches of outward things.*" But neither my ardour nor my arguments availed: he proved quite opaque. In fact he did remind me of Madame de Stael who, to quote from Schiller's famous letter to Goethe: "insists on explaining everything, understanding everything, measuring everything. She admits of no darkness, nothing incommensurable: where her torch throws no light there nothing can exist. . . . She does not prize what is false but does not always perceive what is true!" That is why my English friend could never understand the Indian mind and condemned *vairagya* as "the sickly spawn of a morbid distaste for the world."

Luckily for me, Chadwick happened to be on the spot; so I brought the two together. I shall never forget the great encounter, the memorable "tug-of-war" that followed when "a Greek met a Greek". Were space at my disposal I would have loved to depict the whole duologue. But I must not omit the dramatic *denouement*.

I shall call my critical good friend by the name of Mr. Pontiff.

Mr. Pontiff: I know, Mr. Chadwick, that your Master has attracted a number of men and women of merit and mark. But that is just the reason why we expect them to *do* something.

Chadwick: But we *are* doing something.

Mr. Pontiff: I will ask you a simple question: What on earth are you doing?—And, please don't stall.

Chadwick (*smiling*): Surely, Mr. Pontiff, as a man of the world, you cannot be unaware that a question may often be simple but not its answer.

Mr. Pontiff: I know that. But still?

Chadwick: Supposing I said: each of us here has to come to grips with his ego?

Mr. Pontiff: And when he wins?

Chadwick: The Kingdom of Heaven begins—for him, at all events.

Mr. Pontiff: But for the rest of us?

Chadwick (*smiling*): Why not "wait and see', like Mr. Asquith?

Mr. Pontiff (*looking at him intently*): Don't you think we have been waiting long enough without *seeing* anything?"

Chadwick: Is that a charge framed against us, the quietists, as you love to put it?

Mr. Pontiff: Well, partly. But look here, Mr. Chadwick. Let's be frank and not go on stalling to no purpose. I have not come all this way just to pick holes in your Master's way of doing things. I admire him because he professes to believe in our terrestrial evolution. But, after all, you must admit that in spite of our recurring failures and grievous stumblings it's we, the scientific activists of the West, who dominate the world, and not the passive contemplatives of the East. These can indeed point out to us some of our wrong moves and mistakes; outsiders often can, like the bystanders who watch a game of chess. Don't misunderstand me. I would be the last person to say that the East has nothing to teach us. But then her prophets must become a little more dynamic and come *out* to give it instead of staying immured in their ivory towers of peace and meditation and self-conquest. The great big world moves forward propelled by the law of give and take: if you have nothing to give, you are as good as lost, if not dead, to the rest. For, when all is said and done, the world your Master wants to create can only come into being when its best spirits work for *all* under the broad light of the sun—and not in the dim dusk of a dream seclusion.

Chadwick (*after a pause*): You have put your case rather ably, Mr. Pontiff, I will freely allow. But let me ask you a simple question in my turn. You firmly believe (don't you?) that the world can only be bettered if and when its best spirits work outside on a vocal platform and not, like the silent Orientals, in peaceful Ashrams?

Mr. Pontiff: That's right.

Chadwick: You claim also (do you not?) that the best spirits of the West have not made the mistake of the East, in that they have, by and large, worked outside on the noisy platform of activism—at any rate since the advent of science and industrialism?

Mr. Pontiff: That's right.

Chadwick: Well then, answer my question as man to man: is the Western civilisation rising on the upward curve or falling on the downward?

Mr. Pontiff (*startled*): You mean—

Chadwick: You know perfectly well what I mean. Why do you come to the East to sound her wisdom if all is *essentially* well with the occidental outlook on life? So, please answer me: do you still really believe that the rose of the Western civilisation can possibly flower till we find out how to settle our score once and for all with the deadly canker that is eating into its core?

Mr. Pontiff: And suppose I asked you—what is that canker?

Chadwick (*smiling*): Suppose I told you it's made up of diverse "isms" presided over by your fanatic itch to rush about doing something convincing when you are far from convinced yourselves about the rightness of your vision or the correctness of your method? Yes, I do claim one has to win the right vision first before one can find a clue to the right action.

Mr. Pontiff (*with a lowered head*): I apologise.... because....

Chadwick: Because—?

Mr. Pontiff (*after a hesitant pause*): I begin to understand.

* * *

I have intentionally given the duologue a dramatic turn but it is not all invention: they did joust at each other with animation as well as sincerity and the substance of the debate, as I have given it, is authentic. I can still remember how impressed I was when Chadwick drove Mr. Pontiff to the wall and how the latter admitted his defeat like a sportsman and apologised. (After his departure Chadwick told me, with his characteristic British irony, how grievously Westerners misunderstand the time-old spiritual impulse of the God-mooded Indian (who has experienced the Divine Reality) to want to bring the Divine Grace to bear on the squalor, din and dark discord of dismal life in order to resolve it all into harmony—the impulse which had made him pray so beautifully to the World-Mother overarching gloom-ridden earth-life:

On this dark spirit-main
  Rise as a full-orbed moon,
Transform the murk of pain
  To fleckless silver boon.
Out from a planet's gloom
  All aspects call to Thee,—
Life in our stirless tomb,
  Light on our darkened sea.

I sent a full account of it to Gurudev at the time, and a smile of irony must have hovered round his lips when he commented on the scene which I had reconstructed from memory:

"The view of the world of which Pontiff possibly spoke (he may have meant something more superficial and trivial) cannot come from the mind, still less from the vital expecting something from life as it is. For life *as it is* has nothing to give except to those who are satisfied with surface pleasures." Then, fully endorsing Chadwick's view, he went on to add: *"The inner view can come only from a change of consciousness which sees the deeper inner life behind appearances and it is that change of consciousness which was developing in you because you were drawing back from the vital view of things—the vairagya was only an outward and negative sign of that withdrawal."*

Naturally, I did not expect Mr. Pontiff to understand all this, any more than I expected him to understand what Gurudev wrote to me in another letter explaining how far he could undersign what was dubbed *vairagya* and just where he drew the line.

"I have objected in the past to *vairagya* of the ascetic and the *tamasic* kind," he wrote. "The *vairagya* of one who has tasted the world's gifts or prizes but found them insufficient or tasteless and turns away towards a higher ideal, or the *vairagya* of one who has done his part in life's battles but seen that something greater is demanded of the soul, is perfectly helpful and a good gate to the Yoga. . . . By ascetic *vairagya* I mean that which denies life and world altogether and wants to disappear into the Indefinable—I object to it because my object is to bring the Divine *into* life. But if one is satisfied with life *as it is*, then there is no reason to seek to bring the Divine *into* life. So *vairagya* in the sense of dissatisfaction with life *as it is* is perfectly admissible and, in a certain sense, indispensable for my Yoga."

I do not know whether Mr. Pontiff will ever chance upon my estimate of his short-sighted pragmatism. But in case he does and decides (as is not unlikely) that I have failed to understand him, I would only say this in self-defence that I have railed at him not as an individual but as a type of that mentality which judges even of occult things from a surface-view. If I may use a hackneyed proverb to make my point, I will hazard that not only is it true that none but the wearer knows where the shoe pinches but also that one cannot claim to have stepped into the Yogic shoes till one keeps them on even when they make one bleed, as nothing less can bring home to one the deep maladjustment between one's self-will and the Divine Will, a maladjustment that warped even some gods into rebels, as the sages say.

CHAPTER VIII

GURU, THE ALCHEMIST

To emphasise the difficulty which every Yogi has to face, and for a long time, let me venture a little further and say that the moment one gets along in Yoga, be it ever so little, the ego is confronted with new trials at every turn insomuch that one often feels like giving up in despair. At such crises it is only the Guru's direct help and sleepless guidance that can lift one out of the perilous slough of despond. Only the trouble is that the Guru's help can hardly be fully effective without the co-operation of the disciple who is, generally, too apt to rely more on miracle than on *sadhana*. That is why in spite of the Guru's repeated warnings he is found so prone to mistake a *tamasic* passivity for the *sattwic* surrender. Another reason is that the fool's paradise, however ephemeral, is delectable so long as it lasts; in other words, it is delightful to be lulled by the sophistry that since all is right with the Supervisor above, nothing can be seriously wrong with us, workmen, below. I remember clearly a bad jolt I received from a colleague who said to me flippantly: "If one is obligated to strive hard all the time, what, in the name of horse sense, is the good of having a Guru?" His whole psychological bent and convenient outlook made him look up, first and last, to the miracle of Sri Aurobindo's Force as the one and only solvent of all our difficulties. I told him that Sri Aurobindo had written once clearly and categorically to Nirod on this very point. *"The mistake is to think that it must be either a miraculous Force or none. There is no miraculous Force and I do not deal in miracles."* And then: *"What is Sri Aurobindo's Force? If it is not* a personal property of this body of mine, it is a higher Force used by me or acting through me. Of course it is a Divine Force, for there is only one Force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument."

But, as the psycho-analyst rightly says, human beings are incalculable. For as soon as I quoted this letter to confute my friend's thesis, his eyes danced with joy. "I heartily agree," he cried triumphantly, "for that is just why I adore Gurudev: he will know how to act on me. Why then must I fall back upon individual effort when I can get things done more speedily by surrender? Since I have come for that, the Divine Force will surely act through Sri Aurobindo and transform me." Feeling bewildered, if not discomfited, I appealed again to Gurudev to tell us something definite to go upon and not leave us suspended in mid-air. Whereupon he wrote to me:

"In the early part of sadhana—and by early I do not mean a short part—effort is indispensable. Surrender of course, but surrender is not a thing that is done in a day. The mind has its ideas and it clings to them—the human vital resists surrender, for what it calls surrender in the early stages is a doubtful kind of self-giving with a demand in it—the physical consciousness is like a stone and what it calls surrender is often no more than inertia. It is only the psychic that knows how to surrender and the psychic is usually very much veiled in the beginning. When the psychic awakes, it can bring a sudden and true surrender of the whole being, for the difficulty of the rest is rapidly dealt with and disappears. *But till then effort is indispensable*. Or else, it is necessary till the Force comes flooding down into the being from above and takes up the *sadhana*, does it for one more and more and leaves less and less to individual effort—but even then, if not effort, at least aspiration and vigilance are needed till the possession of mind, will, life and body by the Divine Power is complete."

But one who has not practised Yoga will be hardly likely to realise the point Gurudev wanted to make when he suggested that effort and surrender are interdependent. So I shall close the topic with the report of a talk which a pathetic believer had once with Gurudev on this very point.

"I have tried, sir," he said, "and tried hard, I assure you. But the more I tried, the more I felt it was no use trying till, in the end, I had a brainwave and realised that *you alone could and must* take us out of the wood. So accept us—we are going with you."

Sri Aurobindo only smiled and said:

"I wish you did."

* * *

What he meant was simple enough; but what he implied was not quite so simple. It is not easy to tame the ego, and the task seems for a long time to go on deepening in difficulty because the human ego, when scanned, reveals many a spiral and kink. That is why the act of surrender has remained, throughout the ages, at once the most simple and difficult of achievements. Either the Divine Grace has to intervene or—which is the same thing with those who have taken to a Guru—one has to open oneself more and more to the Guru's Grace till the reversal of consciousness is finally accomplished. Yoga becomes difficult because, among other things, most of us find it far from easy to be simple in this age of deep sophistication brought about by the exorbitant clamouring of the mental part of us to dominate the show and sidetrack the issue. But, for good or for evil, being "sons of an intellectual age" as Gurudev puts it, we needs must make the best of a bad bargain and endeavour to plod on.

So, while on the one hand I wanted to understand Gurudev by questioning him, on the other, I wanted to have the benefit of his ready help in spite of my deep mental reserve even though he, in his infinite compassion, assured me again and again that he was perfectly ready "*to carry me all the way*" if only I would let him. But precisely there was the rub: my mental reserve did not want to sign the blank cheque, as I called it, with the result that I had to trudge on as best I could, profiting, indeed, by his support but not leaning too much on it. Is it any wonder that I should have, in the circumstances, found my way rather hard and rough in spite of the immense help I got from his tireless tolerance and specific directions? One can not both eat one's cake and have it. I could not very well decline the helping light and yet hope to dispel overnight the clinging darkness which caused me again and again to miss his smile of welcome and to misunderstand his injunctions—simple enough in all conscience—till once, surpassing myself in foolishness, I asked him, rhetorically, how I could possibly be expected to say that I wanted only to give myself to the Divine and not want Him, when I did want Him with "every drop of my blood"! "Could I afford to be dishonest?" I wrote grandiloquently, fully persuaded that I had been at once downright and clever if not original and brilliant!

Finally, to force the issue, I proposed to him to be allowed to do without food. I half meant it, I suppose, though I must have dreaded the prospect as I have always been an out and out normal man who had never found a regime of fasting invigorating.

"Since I find, Guru," I advocated, "that do what I will I simply cannot accept the idea of surrendering my ego to your Lordship; since I find life meaningless without a deepening response from the Divine; and, lastly, since I find, I repeat, that I sincerely want you to endow me with the strength I so badly need to be able to get round my pride—please let me know if you will now approve of my *prayopaveshana*. I have read in the lives of some Yogis that they tried it in the last resort and succeeded.

Which brought me one of his tenderest letters.

"Dilip", he wrote, "I wrote to you all that in answer to your statement about your former idea of the Yoga that if one wanted the Divine, the Divine himself would take up the purifying of the heart and develop the *sadhana* and give the necessary experiences. I meant to say that it can and does happen in that way if one has trust and confidence in the Divine and the genuine will to surrender. For such a taking up involves one's putting oneself in the hands of the Divine rather than trusting to one's own efforts alone and this implies one's putting one's trust and confidence in the Divine and a progressive self-giving. It is, in fact, the principle of *sadhana* that I myself followed and it is the central part of Yoga as I envisage it. It is, I suppose, what Sri Ramakrishna meant by the method of the baby cat in his image.* But all cannot follow that at once: it takes time for them to arrive at it—it grows most when the mind and the vital fall quiet.

"What I meant by surrender was this inner surrender of the mind and the vital. There is, of course, the outer surrender also: the giving up of all that is found to conflict with the spirit or need of the *sadhana*, the offering, the obedience to the guidance of the Divine, whether directly, if one has reached that stage, or through the psychic or to the guidance of the Guru. I may say that *prayopaveshana* has nothing to do with surrender: it is a form of *tapasya* of a very austere—and in my opinion, very excessive—kind, often dangerous. But I was speaking of the inner surrender.

"There core of this inner surrender is trust and confidence in the Divine. One takes the attitude 'I want the Divine and nothing else. (I do not know why you should think that you can be asked to give up that—if there is not that, then the Yoga cannot be done). I want to give myself entirely to him and since my soul wants that, it cannot be but that I shall meet and realise him. I ask nothing but that and his action in me to bring me to him, his action secret or open, veiled or manifest. I do not insist on *my* own time and way: let him do all in *his* own time and way, I shall believe in him, accept his will, aspire steadily for his light and presence and joy, go through all difficulties and delays, relying on him and never giving up. Let my mind be quiet and turn to him alone and let him open to it his calm and joy. All for him and myself for him. Whatever happens I will keep to this aspiration and self-giving and go on in perfect reliance that it will be done."

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* Sri Ramakrishna said that the baby monkey clings to its mother whereas the baby cat lets itself be carried by its mother in a spirit of utter surrender and trust.

"That is the attitude into which one must grow: for certainly it cannot be made perfect at once—mental and vital movements cut across—but if one keeps the will to it, it will grow in the being. The rest is a matter of obedience to the guidance when it makes itself manifest—not allowing one's mental and vital movements to interfere.

"It was not my intention to say that this is the only way and *sadhana* cannot be done otherwise—there are so many others by which one can approach the Divine. But this is the only one I know by which the taking up of *sadhana* by the Divine becomes a sensible fact before the preparation of the nature is done. In other methods the Divine action may be felt from time to time, but it remains mostly behind the veil till all is ready. In some *sadhana* the Divine action is not recognised: all must be done by *tapasya*. In most there is a mixing of the two: the *tapasya* finally calling the direct help and intervention. The idea and experience of the Divine doing all belong to the Yoga based on surrender.

"But whatever way is followed, the one thing to be done is to be faithful and go on to the end. You have so often taken that attitude—stand by it, true to the inspiration of your soul.

"All can be done by the Divine: the heart and nature purified, the inner consciousness awakened, the veil removed—if one gives oneself to the Divine with trust and confidence and even if one cannot do so fully at once, yet the more one does so, the more the inner help and guidance come and the contact and the experience of the Divine grow within. If the questioning mind becomes less active and humility and the will to surrender grow in you, this ought to be perfectly possible. No other strength and *tapasya* are then needed but this alone."

But I must again pause here to state once more, even at the risk of repetition, that what he called the "inner surrender", though difficult enough in all conscience, did not seem to us an unattainable ideal all along the line. What I mean will be perfectly intelligible to all who have trod this strait and thorny path spiralling up to self-perfection. For any sincere pilgrim on this path will have realised in his bright moods what a joy it is to *want* to surrender; he will ache to dedicate all he has and is to the Guide outside, whom he can and does equate in his moments of clear vision with the Guide within. But, thanks to motley forces, these bright moments often enough get blurred, assailed by clouds and storms and ambushed glooms so that we *are* deflected from the Path. It is true that these, even when they attack us, cannot render us *hors de combat*, if we are fundamentally sincere and loyal, but it is equally true, alas, that the bulk of *sadhakas*, in every clime and age, must be heirs to human weaknesses and therefore liable to discouragement. (Not for nothing did Shaw write in his *Back to Methuselah* that even his redoubtable "Ancients" could only die from two causes, one of which is discouragement.) That is why every aspirant who has followed this arduous path has had to learn, to his bitter cost, that he can never learn enough the lesson of loyalty to and reliance on the Guru's help without which one can never hope to get anywhere. But even though our native egoism can make it at times all but impossible for us to turn to the Guru for help, it will be untrue to say that it is only difficulties one grapples with all the time. For no one who has sincerely and humbly prayed for help can say with truth that his prayer has never been heard. Had it been so, very few of us could have gone on aspiring for Light when the prospects seemed too dark for words. Also, let me add, through every experience of gloom one does come by something permanently and one of the richest rewards of wrestling with one's own ego is to gain the overwhelming experience, vivid and concrete, namely, a deepening insight into one's own nature in all its complexity. As Gurudev wrote to me once: "*Nobody can understand himself or human nature if he does not perceive the multi-personality of the human-being.*" I do not claim that nothing but Yoga can afford one this clue. Every man who has earnestly striven for self-perfection in life has had to face up to this staggering fact. Even as early as 1795 when Goethe was busy with his scientific studies, he wrote in his famous *Zur Morphology*: "Every living being is not a unity but a plurality. Even when it appears as an individual, it is the reunion of beings living and existing in themselves, identical in origin, but which may appear identical or similar, different or dissimilar.

"The more imperfect a being is the more do its individual parts resemble each other, and the more do these parts resemble the whole. The more perfect the being is the more dissimilar are its parts. In the former case the parts are more or less a repetition of the whole: in the latter case they are totally unlike the whole."

It is as a result of this eminently verifiable fact of life through personal experience that human beings have remained incalculable since the dawn of time. Not only that: with the passage of time this element of unpredictability grows (even as a child grows in stature from day to day) till in adult consciousness every evolved being stands literally bewildered before the warring impulses in his own personality, some pulling him down, others making him soar, as Goethe expressed once with his rare power of imagery. "And when I think that I'm sitting on my hack and riding to the station I am in duty bound for, all of a sudden the mare under me will turn into a creature with uncontrollable desires and wings and run right away from me."

But few people can be as conscious as Goethe of "this multitudinousness in human personality", far less win any clue to the supreme art of harmonising the disparate strands of our nature.* Gurudev has explained this not only in his numerous letters but, what is infinitely more helpful, has placed within our reach the supreme talisman of his Yogic force without which we could at best curb to some extent our "uncontrollable desires" and incomprehensible impulses, but never find the way to changing intrinsically their native movements. As, however, this is not a practical treatise on Yoga I shall not expatiate on this theme any further, but conclude this chapter with just a personal instance if only to clarify what exactly I want to convey by emphasizing the role of the 'transformer' as against that of the 'censor'.

When I came to be initiated in Yoga, I had no very clear idea of what "transformation of nature" meant. So I used to ask Gurudev again and again for clarification.

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* I have related elsewhere an experience—which I need not therefore repeat—with a Maharani. I spoke to her about my faith in the spiritual reality when I was in the grip of gloomy doubts. I wrote to Gurudev asking whether I had been insincere. To which he replied: "Your experience with the Maharani. That happens to everybody: it is when that part of the consciousness comes up which not only believes these things but knows them to be true: the other part which is depressed and open to doubt and denial takes then a back seat or goes underground. People do not know this multitudinousness in human personality, so they call it insincerity in themselves or in others. But it is nothing of the kind. There are certain beliefs and feelings which something in our nature holds on to with a firm grip, and storms and despondencies only cover but cannot destroy them."

(See *Among the Great*, American Edition—pp. 252-353).

Many of these letters have been published so that those who want more light can easily profit by these explanations. All I propose to do here is to give a brief account of what I experienced about the practical side of this transformation under Gurudev's concrete help and guidance.

I knew, of course, that every aspirant was expected to inhibit, or shall I say, reject, the movements of his lower nature. One knows how to *check* impulses; but as to how I was to *change* them I had only the haziest notions. Once, in the 'thirties, I had a long talk with the *late* Upendranath Banerji, a quondam disciple of Gurudev. I remember his deep misgivings about the feasibility of transforming human nature. He said to me that he had definitely "experienced" that Yoga could bring into play forces which not only made a difference but sometimes even bordered upon the miraculous. But for all that, he had remained unconvinced, he added, about its ability to transform our natural and basic impulses. "Man remains at bottom what he is", he contended, "and if changes are brought about they can only be initiated laboriously and consolidated slowly by life, not Yoga."

But he was wrong, I told him this to his face as I gave him an account of my radically changed outlook on life. I talked about things that had appealed to me powerfully once but which appeared, after even a few years of Yoga, worse than pointless—for instance, my career as a musician, my great delight in travelling, my immense zest in several intellectual pursuits, my interest in engrossing pastimes like chess or delightful games like tennis and so on. He gave me a very patient and sympathetic hearing and seemed genuinely interested in my change as I called it, but he wanted something more convincing and concrete to go upon, like some lasting change in my life of instincts or long-standing attachments. I had to be silent. For while, on the one hand, I could not tell all about my private life (and no one should—except to one's Guru) on the other, I could not possibly make him see what I had seen, for the simple reason that Yoga, like love-making, cannot be done by proxy. Not only that: I knew him well; he was, indeed, a highly intelligent man; but his keen intelligence, like that of most intellectuals, demanded that spiritual truth be ultimately assayed by reason alone and that human intellect be the sole Judge of data which belonged to a realm beyond its own jurisdiction. Yet I showed him a letter which Gurudev had written to me in 1935:

"These things should not be spoken of but kept under cover. Even in ordinary non-spiritual things the action of invisible or subjective forces is open to doubt and discussion in which there could be no material certitude—while the spiritual force is invisible in itself and also invisible in its action. So it is idle to try to prove that such and such a result was the effect of a spiritual force. Each must form his own ideas about that—for if it is accepted it cannot be *as a result of* proof and argument, but only as a result of experience, of faith or of that insight in the heart or the deeper intelligence which looks behind appearances and sees what is behind them. *The spiritual consciousness does not claim in that way, it can state the truth about itself but not fight for personal acceptance. A general and impersonal statement about the spiritual force is another matter, but I doubt whether the time has come for it or whether it could be understood by the mere reasoning intelligence.*"

But in as much as Gurudev permitted me last year to publish in America what he had told me about his occult experiences, I may, I think, venture to make public what I could not, twelve years ago. For I know from personal experience that many people are tired today of this sterile scepticism—as I was myself before my plunge for Yoga. Even one of the greatest of modern sceptics, Bertrand Russell, a thinker who once preached the gospel of "the will to doubt" says today in 1950: "But if philosophy is to serve a positive purpose, it must not teach mere scepticism, for, while the dogmatist is harmful, the sceptic is useless."

A welcome change indeed—in one who fought so hard against faith and for so long! So I may perhaps make bold to relate what I have experienced personally about Gurudev's power functioning slowly but surely like that of a true alchemist.

When I had finally taken refuge in the Ashram, in 1928, I was far from realising the import of Gurudev's *sadhana* and aim, especially when he wrote: "*I do not wish to disguise from you the difficulty of this great and tremendous change or the possibility that you may have a long and hard work before you*" etc.* I had not even fully envisaged what was implied by his wanting to change the stuff of our nature without which the higher Yogic consciousness could not, he stressed, possibly come to stay. I only knew of the rejection of the wrong impulses, which everybody equates more or less with controlling or curbing.

But the more I curbed these the more it was borne home to me that although one could act faultlessly up to a point —"scorning delights and living laborious days"—such Miltonic feats of will, however difficult and praiseworthy, fell far short of the aim of Yoga, namely, the total transformation of the impulses which bred the faults and their attendant disharmonies. To give an instance or two: I found that I could, generally speaking, restrain my temper but not help feeling irritated; or, I could refuse tasty dishes but not do away with the greed for them.

The first defect was not so difficult to get rid of. But it was the second, which I am going to write about, that gave me no end of trouble—and how stubbornly! I shall put it as briefly as I can.

When I came to the Ashram I had, naturally, to agree to the vegetarian diet, as Gurudev and Mother were both in favour of vegetarianism. I wanted, nevertheless, to eat fish and meat, especially fish which my Bengali palate simply "adored" like a gourmand. So I missed it more than anything else. I had been told by some that I would get used to the simple vegetarian diet. But the prophecy was not fulfilled. With time my desire for fish only grew till I felt guilty, secretly, and struggled conscientiously against my greed. But in vain. I dreamed of fish—night after night. After eight years of Ashram life I went out for three months and found that my hankering for fish had not yet been conquered. I returned to the Ashram a sadder if a wiser man. To have practised Yoga under the aegis of the greatest Yogi of today and yet to have succumbed to my greed for such inferior pleasures the moment I went outside! But do what I would, I could not bring myself to decline whenever fish was served me in Calcutta and elsewhere. Again and again I took a silent vow never to touch fish any more but again and again I broke it as soon as my friends and relations pressed me to take fish. To cut a long story short, my remorse was brought to a head when, in 1938, I went on eating fish at the palace of my friend and host, Rajarao Dhirendra Narayan Roy. I felt more ill-at-ease in his company since he was at the time a strict vegetarian under medical advice, so that I had no longer even the excuse of being tempted to eat fish in order to be social. But although my weakness made me depressed, yet I simply could not reform. So I started telling others that it did not matter, even quoting scripture like the Prince of Darkness:

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* I have quoted the letter in full in Chapter V while giving an account of the difficulties I had to encounter.

"I think the importance of *sattwic* food from the spiritual point of view has been exaggerated. Food is rather a question of hygiene etc."*

It was eleven years ago and I cannot clearly recall what happened on that memorable night when, after having declined to eat fish for a few days, I again succumbed. All I can remember is that it was a banquet given in my honour by the Rajarao and that the famous caterers Firpo had been requisitioned to make the banquet worthy of my host and his distinguished literary guests. I must have been pressed by these to be "a sport" and so forced to capitulate once again to the irresistible lobsters and the peerless *hilsa* from the Ganges.

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* This letter written to a friend of mine in 1397 was printed subsequently in Vol. II of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Section XI,

That unforgettable night! After the great *eclat* came the inevitable reaction and I felt simply ashamed of myself as never before. I tried to drown my qualms in sleep but in vain. So, I got up, lighted some incense-sticks and prayed at the foot of a portrait of Gurudev. As I thought of him, tears coursed freely down my cheeks.

I do not know how to convince my readers. Probably they will simply decline to be convinced and I could hardly blame them should they doubt my testimony, the less so because, when all is said, one *is* often led to exaggerate when one feels, as I do, a deep gratitude to the benefactor one belauds. But even when I concede this, I cannot possibly admit that I am consciously overstating the experience I have decided to relate as simply and truthfully as I can.

I saw that night the radiant figure of Gurudev—in my dream. He gave me his blessing and said: "*From tomorrow you will be able to give up fish.*"

He vanished. I woke up in a thrill of joy. From the next day, I not only gave up fish but felt not the slightest hankering for it. I have, indeed, taken fish on occasion since, but never with the same relish nor consciousness of being a bondslave to my palate. Perhaps once or twice in six months I have tasted fish but what is far more convincing to me, not to mention gratifying, is that since that momentous night I have never felt the least *craving* for fish. Also, shall I add that I have even last year, during my protracted musical tour, stayed with rich epicures and gourmets and sat at their tables day after day without touching fish once, even though pressed hard to be convivial.

But as the Yogic Force (which produces such indubitable results and brings about changes in the aspirant's outer nature) is invisible to most of us when it is actually working as a leaven in our being and consciousness, we do often feel hard put to it to accept its functioning as "businesslike and practical"—as I often put it to Gurudev. Not that I did not *want* to believe—sometimes I actually *longed* to believe—and yet, often enough, I found it far from easy to accept in toto what he asserted as hundred per cent authentic and verifiable! And with what an accent would he exhort me!—"*It is this faith you need to develop*," he wrote once to me in the 'thirties, "a faith which is in accordance with reason and common sense—that if the Divine exists and has called you to the path, as is evident, then there must be a Divine Guidance behind and that through and in spite of all difficulties you shall arrive. Not to listen to the hostile voices that suggest failure or to the voices of that impatient vital that echo them. not to believe that because great difficulties are there, there can be no success or that because the Divine has not yet shown himself he will never show himself, but to take the position that every one takes when he fixes his mind on a great and difficult goal: 'I will go on till I succeed and I will succeed—al difficulties notwithstanding', to which the believer in the Divine adds: 'The Divine exists, He is there, and since He exists, my following after Him cannot fail. I will go through everything till I find Him."

When he wrote this he knew of course that it was not so easy for impatient aspirants like us, with our eyes straining all the time for quick results, to have an unshakable faith in "an invisible force producing tangible results" as I phrased ~~it. So he went on getting round my~~ non-experience with all the weight of his experience of which I must give one more instance before I draw this topic to a close.

After he wrote to me his famous letter on doubt (quoted in full in my *Among the Great*) I had a wordy tussle with a *sadhaka* in the Ashram. In this instance he seemed to have caught something but I thought he was expressing himself badly when he claimed that "Sri Aurobindo's Force" could not be called "invisible" since it translated itself in "visible changes" even in the outer nature of many an aspirant. So I wrote to Gurudev requesting him to throw some light on this somewhat obscure point. After a lot of speculation I ended on my old note of helpless query: did the Force mean business? Were the changes stressed by my friend incontrovertible? —and so on!

To which he wrote back:

"The Invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness. Your question about Yoga bringing merely a feeling of Power without any result was really very strange. Who would be satisfied with such a meaningless hallucination and call it Power? If we had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functionings of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events, etc. etc., we would not speak of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of feeling Force or Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movements, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way as of other opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga."

And then in reply to my pointed question about my own capacity to achieve results he wrote in the end:

"It is not that you are incapable of it, for it was several times on the point of being done. But your external mind has interfered always—questioning, doubting, asking for something more external, not waiting for the movement to continue, for the inward to externalise itself and make itself concrete. That is why I object to this worship of doubt. It is not that I used not to have doubts myself more formidable than any you have ever thought of—but I did not allow them to interfere with the development of my experience: I let it continue until it had sufficient body for me to know what it was and what it could bring me."

What he referred to here as "on the point of being done" in myself was an experience which used to recur constantly in those days: a deepening of consciousness would set in till I would be just on the point of crossing a line; I would then in my impatience want to expedite this with my active mind and instantly lose the experience. In other words, I would strive a little too hard in my meditation which created a tension and so forfeit the legitimate fruit of my arduous endeavour because of my unyogic attitude of non-passivity. Mother told me pointedly that this created a tension in my consciousness and that was why I baulked just on the threshold of experience. This made me so despondent that I wrote a long letter to Gurudev reproaching him for having kept me in the dark so long when I had been going on the wrong track all through.

"But this is unfair, Guru", I wrote in a rapid crescendo of despair, "since your Yoga, now offered to us, seems to be cultured for superhuman beings. But then how could it help us, feckless mortals, who must take only one of two attitudes: effort or inertia. So, I strained, alas, only to be told that straining could not help. And yet when X wrote he wanted to do nothing you girded at his lethargy and Mother told him that God only helped those who helped themselves! You do remind one of Krishna who enjoyed driving Arjuna mad by exhorting him to hunt with the hounds just after having counselled him to run with the hare."

He gave me a long reply to this which I need not quote in full as it has already been printed in part: I shall only quote a portion from it which was kept back at the time as being too personal.

After stressing once more the difference between a "vital straining and pulling and a spontaneous psychic openness", he added:

"It is not that pulling and straining and tension can do nothing; in the end they prevail for some result or another, but with difficulty, delay, struggle, strong upheavals of the Force breaking through in spite of all. Sri Ramakrishna himself began by pulling and straining and got his result, but at the cost of a tremendous and perilous upsetting; afterwards he took the quiet psychic way whenever he wanted a result and got it with ease and in a minimum time. You say that this way is too difficult for you or the likes of you.... That is a strange misconception, for it is on the contrary the easiest and simplest and the most direct way, and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet; even those who have a tenth of your capacity can do it. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of *tapasya*. As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer, a work such as I am certain none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent or embody the Divine, but to represent, too, the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or *lila* but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path."

And lastly with what solicitude and tender affection he consoled the recalcitrant!—

"But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others—if they will only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others: Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you—if secretly, he will show himself in good time—do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey."

I do not know if any other Guru in the past ever spoke in such language not only throbbing with sincerity but—to quote Madame Gabriel Mistral's tribute to Sri Aurobindo —"presenting the rare phenomenon of an exposition clear as a beautiful diamond without the danger of confounding the layman." And, she cogently adds: "Six foreign languages have given the Master of Pondichery a gift of co-ordination, a clarity free from gaudiness, and a charm that borders on the magical. . . . We have before us a prose which approximates to that of the great Eckhart, German classicist and fountain-head of European mysticism." So she rejoices: "These are indeed 'glad tidings' that come to us: to know that there is a place in the world where culture has reached its tone of dignity by uniting in one man a supernatural life with a consummate literary style, thus making use of his beautifully austere and classical prose to serve as the handmaid of the spirit."

She has hit the nail on the head, for the Guru in Sri Aurobindo becomes so convincing to sceptics like myself because even when we stay opaque to his spiritual vision, he moves us, in spite of ourselves, to a partial psychic translucency by this irresistible "gift" of his crystalline experience and expression which "reaches us" at a time when we are besieged by a "petrifying materialism."

As I read the above tribute after the passing of Sri Aurobindo on the 5th December, last year (1950), a great sadness invaded me. Yes, I told myself, she is right. Perhaps it was this obstinate crust of scepticism even in his disciples, on whom he had showered so much love, that was partly responsible for his withdrawal! And what a love it was! It moved me to joy and melancholy when I read of this burning aspiration to change the suffering earth by the light he had himself attained and yet could not fully bring down—just because we, his might-have-been beneficiaries, combated it with our deep, persistent denial and would not wholly believe that he had, indeed, come to us to lead our earth-consciousness to a higher and wider fulfilment. We only, alas, went on asking ourselves whether he had really meant it when he announced in his credo, *Savitri*, that the supreme manifestation must be sought not in the viewless Empyrean but here below, on earth, because

> "Earth is the chosen place of the mightiest souls;
> Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
> The forge where the Arch-mason shapes his works."

And lastly, when the Supreme invited Savitri to leave "the earthly race" to its imperfect light because "all shall be done by the long act of Time," she answered that she had never hankered for a selfish salvation:

> "Even the charm of thy alluring voice,
> O blissful Godhead, cannot seize and snare.
> I sacrifice not earth to happier worlds,
> I keep my will to save the world and man."

One is reminded of the great Prahlad's prayer to the Lord in the Bhagavat (7.9.44):

> Often, O Lord, the solitaries
> in a silence live apart
> Aspiring only to perfect
> their own salvation's marvel art,
> Oblivious to the anarchy
> of life, unmindful of the vast
> Sorrow's tears wherewith the earth
> is soaked from centre to the crust.

Who will redeem this suffering
  if thy compassion stand aside?
I ache not for salvation if
  the rest in misery abide.

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CHAPTER IX

AVOWEDLY PERSONAL

In the previous chapter the closing stress was on Sri Aurobindo's vision of earth as the final venue of heroic souls who are sent to carry through a great experiment because this earth has been chosen as "*the forge where the Arch-mason shapes His works.*" This experiment has a twofold movement: first, the aspiration of the animality of man after Divinity and, secondly, the invocation of the answering Divinity in order to transform the seemingly ineradicable animality which has been the despair of idealists. That is why Sri Aurobindo speaks so emphatically of the Descent of the Divine Power into our dismal humanity, a descent missioned to promote a new manifestation in the "earth-consciousness."

But to invoke the Divine Power for the redemption of earth-life is one thing, to apply the power to alleviate the "misery" of man is quite another. How hard this task is in practice is difficult for most of us to realise because, for one thing, few of us have any knowledge of occult powers and even less clue to how to make use of them when such powers are given us—as they occasionally are, before we have acquired some real insight into the mysterious springs of human nature and action. Sri Aurobindo gave me a pregnant hint of this deep difficulty in 1924, when he said that he had come to realise through his Yogic knowledge that "to help humanity out, it is not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually" because "even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay till the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent. . . . Consequently the utmost you can do, here and now, is to communicate only partially the light of your realisation in the measure people are receptive."*

What he meant by this I will try to explain with the light I got from him in my own *sadhana*.

As I lived in his Ashram and, much to my shame, tussled with him in my pathetic ignorance which made me rush in again and again where much greater beings than I had feared to tread, I felt a great load weighing down my consciousness, as it were. For as the days passed, I came to realise, increasingly, how much I had been found wanting: day after depressing day, I saw how I was petering out, even though the more restive I grew the more patiently he gave me a long rope. He did this not to force the balm of his wisdom on my unruly ego but to show me the way to my own higher nature which the thunder-storms of my boisterous self-will blurred so effectively from my "rational eyes", as I put it self-appreciatively. Month after weary month I challenged him to prove his thesis which I knew in my heart of hearts to be true and yet, curiously, I declined to meet him half-way everytime he leaned down to accord me a warm hand-clasp. I aimed at him my crude gibes but he came down unperturbed to my level and met me with his smiling repartees. I doubted him but he blessed me in return. Year after I resisted him but he only crooned to sleep the Old Adam in me. Those who, in their noisy ignorance, castigate the dogmatism of spiritual teachers may appear very sweetly undogmatic to the uninformed, but those who have even once come into contact with an authentic Guru can only testify to his incredible patience and tolerance.

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* Among the Great (American edition) p. 219-20.

But what I wish to stress here is not simply his tolerance and patience, nor even his peerless capacity for understanding the rebel's point of view, but a gift, amounting to genius, of appraising in imaginative sympathy the latter's position as a questioning seeker and then coming down to his level of intelligence and receptivity. To give an instance in point:

I had come to the Ashram with a strong mental formation in favour of asceticism. So even though I loved *karma*—being, by nature, ineradicably *rajasic*—I wanted to trail off into inaction of the *sattwic* type, to shine as a living example of inaction, *bhakti* and wisdom. I was told by a *gurubhai* that Gurudev favoured a dynamic spirituality and *karma* as against static wisdom. This made me at once glad and sad. Glad because I was by nature energetic; sad because I feared that *karma* would tether me irrevocably to the world and therefore, *a fortiori*, to my present state of non-experience as against transcendent God-realisation. Yet why must he go on browbeating Nirod, the charming pessimist, with his Aurobindonian gospel of incessant *karma* to the exclusion of *jnana* and inveigh against those who, like Dilip, loved the traditional thoroughfare of *bhakti* which at least led somewhere? Did not even the great Sri Ramakrishna warn the spiritual aspirant against being caught in the toils of *karma* when he gave the simile of the wife carrying a child, saying that the nearer she draws to her confinement the lighter is made the load of her work till, when the child is born, she has only to live for the child to the exclusion of everything else?

As I waxed eloquent over the bliss of inaction, often enough I went too far: my impulse landed me in an anticlimax and I looked like a disciple who wanted to give points to his Guru. So I apologised in a postscript: wouldn't he pardon my unpardonable temerity? For if he got displeased with me, where would I be? And then wasn't I at least an energetic worker in practice though an opponent of karma in idealistic theory. . . . . . ?

To that he wrote, indulgent as ever (1934):

"I do not understand why you should assume that I am displeased with the *karma* question. I castigated or fustigated Nirod not from displeasure nor even 'more in sorrow than in anger', but for fun and also from a high sense of duty: for that erring mortal was bold enough to generalise from his very limited experience and impose it as a definite law in Yoga, discrediting in the process my own immortal philosophy! What then could I do but to jump on him in a spirit of genial massacre?"

Nirod used to come almost daily in those days as we two happened to be birds of the same shade of sky-hostile feather. Thus while roosting together, we two drowned our world-disapproval many a time in our morning jeremaids over the tea. So we chuckled at this point, albeit, alas, a little too prematurely!

"I am afraid," Sri Aurobindo went on to add, "your letter too does very much the same thing. For in spite of your disclaimer, you practically come to the conclusion that all my nonsense about integral Yoga and *karma* being as much a way to realisation as *jnana* and *bhakti* is either a gleaming chimera or practicable only by Avatars or else a sheer laborious superfluity—since one can jump straight into the Divine through the open door of *bhakti* or sweep majestically into Him by the easy road of meditation, so why this scramble through the jungle of *karma* by which nobody reached anywhere? The old Yogas are true, are they not? Then why a new-fangled and more difficult one with this unheard-of talk about Supramental and God knows what else? There can be no answer to that; for I can only answer by a repetition of the statement of my own knowledge and experience. That is what I have done in my today's answer to Nirod and perhaps that amounts only to a perverse obstinacy in riding my gleaming and dazzling chimera and forcing my nuisance of a superfluity on a world weary of itself and anxious to get an easy short cut to the Divine. Unfortunately, *I do not believe in short* *cuts*—at any rate none ever led me where I wanted to go. However, let it rest there.

"I have never disputed the truth of the old Yogas—I have myself had the experience of Vaishnava *bhakti* or of *nirvana*, I recognise their truth in their own field and for their own purpose—the truth of their experience so far as it goes—though I am in no way bound to accept the truth of the mental philosophies founded on the experience. I similarly find that my Yoga is true in its own field —a larger field, as I think—and for its own purpose. The purpose of the old is to get away from life to the Divine —so obviously, let us drop *karma*. The purpose of the new is to reach the Divine and bring fullness of what is gained *into* life—for that, the Yoga by works is indispensable. It seems to me that there is no mystery about that or anything to perplex anybody—it is rational and inevitable. Only you say that the thing is impossible; but that is what is said about everything before it is done.

"I may point out, however, that *karmayoga* existed even before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best use of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would hardly have been justified in writing two volumes on it or the world in reading it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow, whether works can lead to realisation—or rather, your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility—contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer,—yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is just what one has to learn not to do. For that matter, thought and feeling also can externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument. Difficult? Even *bhakti* is not easy and *nirvana*, for most men, is more difficult than that.

"You again try to floor me with Ramakrishna. But something puzzles me, as Shankara's stupendous activity of *karma* puzzles me in the apostle of inaction!—you see you are not the only puzzled person in the world! Ramakrishna also gave the image of the jar which ceased gurgling when it was full. Well, but Ramakrishna spent the last few years of his life in talking about the Divine and receiving disciples—was that not action, not work? Did Ramakrishna become a half-full jar after being a full one or was he never full? Did he get far away from God and so begin work? Or had he reached a condition in which he was bound neither to *rajasic* work and mental prattling nor to inactivity and silence, but could do, from the divine realisation, the divine works and speak, from the inner consciousness, of the divine world? If the last, then perhaps, in spite of the dictum, his example at least is rather in my favour.

"I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, X's activism, philanthropical service, etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my works, so they do not touch me. I never thought that the Congress politics or feeding the poor or writing beautiful poems would lead straight to Vaikuntha or the Absolute. If it were so, Romesh Dutt on one side and Baudelaire on the other would be the first to attain the highest and welcome us there. It is not the form of the work itself or mere activity but the consciousness and Godward will behind it that are the essence of *karma yoga*; the work is only the necessary instrumentation for the union with the Master of works, the transit to the pure will and power of Light from the will and power of the Ignorance.

"Finally, why suppose that I am against meditation or *bhakti*? I have not the slightest objection to your taking either or both as the means of approach to the Divine. Only I saw no reason why anyone should fall foul of works and deny the testimony of those who, as the Gita says, reached through works perfect realisation and oneness of nature with the Divine—*samsiddhim sadharmyam* (as did Janaka and others)—simply because he himself cannot find or has not found their deeper secret; hence my defence of works."

His indulgence emboldened me. But paradoxical though it may sound, I myself loved *karma* for its own sake, and yet found my mind championing quietism as soon as he emphasised activism, knowing all the time that *his* brand of activism was very different from ours. Thus, in the present instance, just when I felt his greatness most, I was conscious of a division in me and then and there I penned a long letter to him attempting in my inept way to rail at his theory about *karma*. I wrote that I was delighted that he had lifted the ban on *bhakti;* that I was indeed thankful for small mercies; that he confounded us beautifully with his paradoxes—wasn't that why he wrote about his being "puzzled"? and so on. I went on then to ask him if it were really possible to refer all our works to the Divine. I reminded him once more that though I had tried to "remember" Krishna while I worked, I found that I failed utterly in the attempt for more than a few minutes at a time because I got quickly absorbed in whatever I undertook. So I had come in the end to ask myself if "offering one's works" could prove a practical proposition. In short, *bhakti* and *jnana*, I contended, meant business whereas *karma* only landed one in a quandary, because the moment it became interesting, it took entire possession of the mind and therefore could not be offered to the Divine. To put it more succinctly, through works none had so far arrived, while through *bhakti* and *jnana* at least a brilliant galaxy had achieved an exit. So why on earth must one stick to the mantra: *Yat karomi Jaganmatastadeva tava pujanam* (whatever I do, O World-Mother, is an oblation to thee!)? Lastly, I asked him whether his new-fangled Integral Yoga could really succeed with anyone who was not congenitally a Hercules? "*Nayamatma valahinena labhyah*" said the Upanishad.

But, if "none but the strong deserved the fair Soul's favours", what hope was there for the likes of us who could not claim the strength of a Ramakrishna, a Shankar, a Ramana Maharshi or a Vivekananda? Thus I went on blowing my bubbles of sorrow, inveigled by their phantom iridescence.

But this time he did not choose to meet my banter with banter and wrote back in high if not stern seriousness:

"I must again point out that I have never put any ban on *bhakti*, so there is no meaning in your saying that I have lifted a ban which never existed. Also I am not conscious of having banned meditation either at any time—so the satirical praise of my mercifulness is out of place. I imagine I have stressed both *bhakti* and knowledge in my Yoga as well as works, even if I have not given to any of them exclusive importance like Shankara or Chaitanya. Also I think I have not imposed my own choice unduly upon anyone in the matter of *sadhana*. Those who wanted to go wholesale for meditation, I have left to do so without any interference, though not without any help I could give. I have latterly sometimes discounselled entire retirement, but that was because I did not want a repetition of the cases of N and others who, in spite of my warnings, went in for it and came to grief. I have written what I thought when people asked me; but if they no use for my ideas about things, why do they ask me?

"My remarks about being puzzled were, by the way, mere Socratic irony. Of course I am not in the least puzzled by the case either of Shankara or of Ramakrishna.

"The difficulty you feel or any *sadhaka* feels about *sadhana* is not really a question of meditation versus *bhakti* versus works; it is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you call it. Yours seems to be characterised on one side by a tremendous effort in the mind, on the other a gloomy certitude in the vital which seems to watch and mutter under the breath if not aloud: 'Yes, yes, go ahead, my fine fellow, but—it will come to nothing,' and then at the end of meditation: 'What did

I tell you, hasn't it come to nothing?' A vital so ready to despair that even after a 'glorious' flood of poetry it uses the occasion to preach the gospel of defeatism! I have passed through most of the difficulties of the *sadhakas*, but I cannot recollect to have looked on delight of poetical creation or concentration in it as something undivine and a cause for despair. This seems to me excessive. Even Shankaracharya would not agree with you here.

"If you can't remember the Divine all the time you are writing, it does not greatly matter. To remember and dedicate at the beginning and give thanks at the end ought to be enough. Or, at the most, to remember too when there is a pause. Your method seems to me rather painful and difficult, you seem to be trying to remember and work with the same part of your mind. I don't know if that is possible. When people remember all the time during work (it can be done) it is usually with the back of their minds or else there is created gradually a double consciousness—one in front that works, one within that witnesses and remembers. But this is only a comment—I am not asking you to try that. For usually it does not come so much by trying as by a very simple constant aspiration and will of consecration—which does bring results, even if in some it takes a long time about it. That is a great secret of *sadhana*—to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind's effort. Let me hasten to say, however, that I am not dogmatising —I don't mean to say that the mind's effort is unnecessary or has no result—only if it tries to do all by itself, that becomes a laborious effort for all except the spiritual athletes. Nor do I mean that the other method is the longed-for short cut; the result may, as I have said, take a long time. Patience and firm resolution are necessary in every method of *sadhana*.

"Strength is all right for the strong—but the aspiration and Grace answering to it are not altogether myths. Again, you see, I am muddling the human mind—like Krishna of the Gita—by supporting contrary things at the same time—can't help it—it is my nature.

"But I am unable to explain further today—so I break off these divagations. I am rather too overburdened with 'work' these days to have much time for the expression of 'knowledge'. This is simply a random answer."

The general reader, I feel, is likely to appraise the value of letters such as these in terms either of their weightiness of matter or profundity of wisdom. But to us, his disciples, every such communication was valued even more as a token of his Grace than for its other merits, as also because of the light it carried from the fount of his luminous personality which we had grown to cherish. To me, personally, his letters radiating affection imparted something even more convincing—possibly because only such personal letters could convey to my sceptic mind the light of seerhood that hovered round him, through a receptive emotion which nothing short of an intimate contact with his soul of compassion could arouse. Besides, had he not written to me once: "I am certainly not helping you only with letters, but doing it whenever I get some time for concentration and I notice that when I can do it with sufficient energy and at some length there *is* a response." Outsiders may not seize the import of this, but as I saw the effect of his concentration on and for me day after patient day, I had to believe in its concrete efficacy. Could it be otherwise when, time and time and again, I experienced my glooms melting away like mists before sunrise and strength returning to me through his exhortations dripping every time the deep tenderness of his solicitude? On one occasion my gloom evaporated in a moment—it was almost like a let-there-be-light-and-there-was-light miracle. I was at the time in an utter mental prostration and wrote that I could well understand his inability to help me out of the abyss of my despond since he could not possibly spare time for one so opaque to his force. To that he wrote: "Want of time does not come in the way as there is no day on which I do not devote some time to thinking of you and concentrating for you. The difficulty lies in the removal of the obstruction in the physical mind—what you feel as the impasse. But it will go if you persevere. What seemed to me denied and impossible for years (bringing about a state of helpless stagnation and hopelessness and disbelief in even the goodwill and power of the Divine, the spiritual Force and the Guru) suddenly happens after all—when those who never had any experience for years get the opening. The difficulty is great and the darkness of the material consciousness obstinate, but still if one knows how to persist or even to wait, the Light comes. . . ."

And then he went on to add reassuringly:

"It is not true that you never received force from us. You have received it *to any extent;* it can only be said that you were not conscious of it, but that happens with many. Certainly none of the *sadhakas* receives or uses all the Force that the Mother sends, but that is a general fact and not peculiar to you. I hope you will not carry out your idea of going suddenly away. . . . *Whatever else you may doubt, you should not doubt that our love and affection will always be with you.* But I still hope that you will be able to overcome this despair and develop the great force of intense will that is sure to come."

And he wrote in a postscript in reply to my sigh over his preoccupation with the Empyrean: "No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish I was! It is rather with the opposite end of things: it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two."

What exactly he meant by building a bridge and what was the nature of the resistance he was confronted with at every turn we shall probably never know, but we can surely infer from his beautiful if somewhat sad poem, *A God's Labour*, that he had known all along that it was unlikely to be an easy achievement of swift Yogic engineering:

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
Marrying the soil to the sky

And sow in this dancing planet midge
The moods of infinity.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
Too frail their ethereal stuff;
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
The roots were not deep enough.

How could the "roots" be "deep enough" when we, instead of tending the saplings, would throw so lightly away the seeds of faith and aspiration he would plant again and again in us? To give but one instance, one of his disciples on whom he had simply lavished his love declined to change and deserted. A year later this man wrote to me flaunting not only an ephemeral success of a trivial undertaking of his but rationalising it into a deep (?) philosophy:

"Life is a mirror, Dilip," he poetised complacently, "and being a mirror, it must return smile for smile and frown for frown." I forwarded it to Gurudev and received his comment the next morning:

"As for his 'philosophy' it is phrases and nothing else: what he means is, I suppose, that when one is successful one can be jolly—which is not philosophy but commonplace, only he turns it upside down to make it look wise. Or perhaps he means that if you smile at Mussolini and Hitler they will spare you castor-oil or cudgel: but even that is not sure, for they may want to know what the smile means first—flattery or satire."

But smile or no smile, he added, one must stave off defeatism and eschew the expensive luxury of despondency:

"Don't allow the assailant (Insidious Mr. Doubt) to become a companion, don't give him the open door and fireside seat. Above all, don't drive away the incoming Divine with that dispiriting wet blanket of sadness and despair! Or, to put it more soberly, accept once for all that this thing *has* to be done, that it is the only thing left for yourself on the earth. Outside are earthquakes and

Hitlers and a collapsing civilization and generally speaking, the ass and the flood.* All the more reason to tend towards the one thing to be done, the thing you have been sent to do, and for getting it done. It is difficult and the way long and the encouragement given meagre? So what? Why should you expect so great a thing to be easy or that there must be either a swift success or none? The difficulties have to be faced, and the more cheerfully they are faced, the sooner will they be overcome. The one thing to do is to foster the fixed resolve: '*Have it I must and have it I will*'. Impossible? There is no such thing as impossibility: there are difficulties and things of *longue haleine,* but impossibilities, no. What one is determined fixedly to do, will get done—now or later it becomes possible. Drive out the dark despair and go bravely on with your poetry, your novels and your Yoga. As the darkness disappears, the inner doors too will open."

Tagore once said of the poetry of my father, Dwijendra Lal Roy, that he passed from the serious to the light moods with an astonishing ease of transit. The same might be said of Sri Aurobindo's letters though not of his other writings which are more concerned with an illumined clarity than with the chiaroscuro of wit and humour. We had come to the Ashram drawn by this magnetic light with which his messages were instinct. But it was, more often than not, a dazzle rather than an effulgence to our novice eyes. So when, in the 'thirties, he started writing his letters, somewhat freely, naturally we all acclaimed them as much for the relief as for the rapture his light moods occasioned in our somewhat over-impressed breasts still resonant with the tribute of a quondam Prime Minister of England:

"I called on one whose name is on every lip as a wild extremist across whose path the shadow of the hangman falls. . . . He talked of things which trouble the soul of man; he wandered aimlessly into the dim regions of aspiration where the mind finds a soothing resting-place. He was far more a mystic than a politician. He saw India seated on a temple throne. . . . Man has to fulfil God, he has written, and that is only possible by fulfilling himself, this again being possible only through nationality. . . . The *Matripuja*—the worship of the Mother—has become a political rite. . . . He returns to his Gods and to the faith of his country for there is no India without its faith and no faith without India."*

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* Reference is to a parable which is to follow presently.

We felt a sense of relief because when we dwell on tributes such as these the awe they generate militate against the sense of kinship we so often strive to feel with the Guru but in vain: he is too great for such as we, is he not? —we ask ourselves almost with a pang. But *laus Deo*—when such a heart-warming personality comes down to us with letters limpid with love and a human understanding which we can undestand, then comes the thrill because the incredible thing then seems to have come to pass: even such a giant can then, on occasions, dwarf himself so that we may feel his humanity! I can almost recapture the thrill which his first letters gave us and the mystic thanksgiving that rose from our hearts like vapour from a calm lake at sundawn, wistful and yet iridescent with romance. For such a great revolutionary, who matured later into an even greater Yogi of invulnerable gravity, to have retained unimpaired the human zest for laughter and humour and repartees! About his humour we gathered titbits only through anecdotes and cautious gossip and I learned, to my immense relief, that though in society he withdrew generally into the shell of his deep, congenital reserve, with his intimates of the inner circle he had always loved to indulge in banter and laughter and quips of every description. An old friend of his once gave me a sample of his pre-yogic humour. "The Prince of Baroda was going to be married," he said. "Sri Aurobindo was then the Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar's College. When the distinguished guests had assembled for the wedding dinner, the royal bridegroom came up to him dignified and demure. The grave Vice-Principal, revered by all, shook hands with 'the cynosure of neighbouring eyes' and wished him 'Many many happy returns of the day!' "

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* Quoted from J. Ramsay Macdonald's *The Awakening in India* first published in London in 1910.

As I have said, in the Ashram they often told me how refreshingly he used to spar with his adherents of old. I always envied them the privilege they had enjoyed till, in the course of time, he began writing freely to me. I must quote here in full the first letter he wrote, in 1932 shedding the solace of his humour on my badly hurt head:

"You struck your head against the upper sill of the door our engineer Chandulal fixed in your room? A pity, no doubt. But remember that Chandulal's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable: the only thing he forgot was that people—of various sizes—should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian *objective* point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then this will be brought home to you and you will see that it was quite all right. It is only when you bring in irrelevant *subjective* considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of a stunned head, that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to Chandulal in the morning and get him to do what has (practically, not philosophically) to be done. May I suggest, however, if it is any consolation to you, that our Lilliputian engineer perhaps measured things by his own head, forgetting that there were in the Ashram higher heads and broader shoulders? . . . As for the Divine rapture, a knock on the head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the physical *ananda* of pain or pain and *ananda* or pure physical *ananda*—for I have often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with honours. It began, by the way, as far back as in Alipore Jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits, e.g. the case of the picketers in Madras or Dr. Noel Paton." (These were beaten by the police as a result of which there were many fractured skulls.) "In any case their way of having rapture is better off the list and that dwarfish doorway was not a happy contrivance."

Then came, in 1934, his comment on the parable I had retailed to him of the ass and the flood:

"Once upon a time, Guru, there was a foolish ass who lived in the neighbourhood of a wise Yogi. One day a sudden flood burst the banks of a river nearby and flooded the countryside. The wise Yogi, being wise, ran up till he reached the safe top of a hill at the foot of which he used to meditate day and night in a cave. But the ass—being asinine, not to say unmeditative—was swept away by the rushing tides. 'Alas!' he brayed, 'the world is drowning!' 'Don't be an ass,' reprimanded the Yogi in high scorn from up the hill-top. 'It's only you who are drowning—not this great big world.' 'But sir,' argued the idiot, 'if I drown how can I be sure that the world will survive?' And the Yogi was struck dumb and wondered, for the first time, which was the deeper wisdom—the human or the asinine! And I too have started wondering on my own, Guru!" I added. "So I appeal to you to adjudicate: tell me whose is the more pitiable plight: the Yogi's or the ass's? And incidentally, tell me also if my mind is going off the handle because I find the foolish ass's argument nearly as rational as the wise Yogi's?"

To that he replied: "Your wise but not overwise ass has put a question that cannot be answered in two lines. Let me say, however, in defence of the much-maligned ass that he is a very clever and practical animal and the malignant imputation of stupidity to him shows only human stupidity at its worst. It is because the ass does not do what man wants him to do even under blows, that he is taxed with stupidity.

"But really, the ass behaves like that first because he has a sense of humour and likes to provoke the two-legged beast into irrational antics; and secondly, because he finds that what man wants of him is quite a ridiculous and bothersome nuisance which ought not to be demanded of any self-respecting donkey. Also note that the ass is a philosopher. When he hee-haws, it is out of a supreme contempt for the world in general and for the human imbecile in particular. I have no doubt that in the asinine language man has the same significance as ass in ours. These deep and original considerations are, however, by the way—merely meant to hint to you that your balancing between a wise man and the wise ass is not so alarming a symptom after all."

Once a rather funny thing happened in 1933. We used in those days to have a musical programme in the Ashram, about once in two months. As I was singing a song on Krishna on one such occasion with Mother sitting before me in *samadhi*, I was conscious of a sudden commotion behind me where the others were sitting. A senior *sadhaka* of considerable girth, Purushottam—so I was told subsequently—got up on a sudden to dance when Ambu, a rather thin though strong youth, leapt up to restrain the other's indomitable esctasy, as a result of which there was necessarily, a tussle. So the musical *soiree* was partially spoiled. This saddened me and I asked Sri Aurobindo if I had been responsible in any way, or if I had simulated a *bhakti* unfelt by my heart. To that he replied:

"There was no misdirection of your appeal to Krishna if there was anybody responsible it was Anilkumar with his *tabla* (Indian drum). But there was nothing wrong and no possession in the evil sense of the word—nothing hostile. The beat of the *tabla*—more than anything else—created a vibration which was caught hold of by some rhythmic material energy and that in turn was caught hold of by Purushottam's body which considered itself unde a compulsion to execute the rhythm by a dance. Ther is the whole (occult) science and genesis of the affair. Purushottam thought he was inspired and in a trance; Ambu thought Purushottam was going to break his own head and other people's legs; a number of others thought Purushottam was going cracked or already cracked; some thought Purushottam was killing Ambu which Ambu contemptuously rejects, saying he was able to hold Purushottam all alone, and out of these conflicting mental judgments—if they can be called so—arose the whole row. A greater quietude in people's minds would have allowed the incident to be 'liquidated' in a less uproarious fashion —but the Mother was absorbed in the music and could only intervene later on when Champaklal consulted her. That is all."

And sometimes, though rarely, we had pure fun as well—just unqualified laughter and mirth. To give an instance or two:

I had a friend whom we called Bindu. He wrote to Gurudev (1934) a long letter besieging him with a number of world-shaking questions to which the reply came in due course:

"Bindu,

Good heavens! But what! But when! But which! You expect me to give you 'clear and concise' notes on all that, fixing the 'nature and salient features' of each blessed thing? It will take me several Sundays wholly devoted to grappling with this tremendous task! And how the deuce am I to tell you in a 'clear and concise way' what consciousness is or mind or life is? Do you think these confounded entities are themselves clear and concise or have any 'salient features'? They are 'salient' only in the Latin sense of jumping about all the time and becoming something different each moment. As for 'consciousness' you might as well ask me to define the world. Of course I could do it by replying—'a damned mess', and that would be very satisfactory to me as well as 'clear and concise' but it would hardly serve the purpose."

Bindu had, however, a peculiar humour wedded to a native gift for insistence which he developed like a master craftsman till it looked almost indistinguishable from genius. I can give it no other name because in those days Gurudev or Mother never allowed outsiders to cook for them. But his sheer importunate genius prevailed and he was allowed to cook what we call *prasad*. This he sent up duly to Gurudev who ate of it but not much, whereupon Bindu penned him a disconsolate letter a copy of which I still possess.

"Gurudev," he wrote, "Nalina brought me back the dishes. I was stunned to find that you had hardly touched them. I am deeply pained, sorely disappointed, utterly dejected and mortally wounded, and cannot imagine why you are so unsympathetic to me."

Gurudev wrote back a sweet letter of solace:

"Bindu!

Don't be absurd! Our sympathy towards you is profound and perfect, but it cannot be measured by our sympathy towards your eatables. We, usually, just taste the *prasad* people send to us; sometimes we take more but never when it is very sweet or very extraordinary. Of your vermicelli pudding we could well speak in the language of the passionate address of the lover to his beloved: 'O sweet! O too too sweet!' (which doesn't mean though, that it was not well done). And the stew was extraordinary, albeit of another world—so much so tha if I tasted the first forkful with anxiety, the second was with awe, after which I ventured no farther into thes unknown countries. By the way, I took much more o the vermicelli than I usually do of these concentrate puddings. So you are wrong in thinking that I did no touch your *prasad*."

* * *

Bindu came triumphantly to me flourishing the lette as a lethal weapon.

"You may write to him reams and reams of letters and Poems and what not," he chortled, "but you dare not Ask for him."

"Don't be silly!" I returned. "Any duffer can."

"I defy you to prove it, scoffer!" he retaliated.

I had to accept the challenge, to save my face. But here too came a snag, for the stipulation was that I must peel, boil, fry—in a word, do all that had to be done single-handed.

So when I had playfully accepted the gauntlet flung by him, I felt scared: how could one who had never even boiled an egg in his life manipulate into being an eatable dish over the stove? Joking was all right, but I could hardly send up to Gurudev and Mother a horrible concoction as a *prasad!* Suddenly I had a brain-wave: I ppealed piteously to an experienced matron, Amiya, to come to my rescue and thus prove my saviour. I asked her to direct me, verbally, without moving a finger. And o, it worked! The incredible miracle was achieved! A egetable *entree* of potatoes, peas, and tomatoes was got eady by myself, single-handed, in less than an hour and half! As I sent it up to Gurudev I wrote in my explanaory letter all about its genesis and evolution and then went on to add, casually, that though it was literally "cooked all by myself," I had availed myself of a few whispering directions" by Amiya.

His heartening letter came duly, the next morning.

"Your cooking is remarkable and wonderful," he wrote. If you had not disclosed the secret about Amiya's whispers' I would have been inclined to claim it as a ogic *miracle!* Even with the 'whispers' it is an astonishg first success. *Ashcharyavat pashyati kashchidenam*[*] as e Gita says! My palate and stomach as well as my pen as done full justice to the event."

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[*] Krishna's saying—it means 'some look upon it as amazing.'

"Guru," I wrote once, "Lady Indignant told me today that she had reported of late to you that she was being forced by me and Saurin to accept our invitations to tea. A word in self-defence. We never suspected that she had disliked our—shall I say—'chivalry.' In fact when we invited her she complied after a few no's which we had, naturally, interpreted as 'yes' because when she came to tea, she, with her face wreathed in smiles, did not at all toy with the tea, far less with the cakes! 'Caprice!' I philosophised ruefully, 'thy name is woman!' But henceforth—now that the iron has entered my soul—she comes to tea to us at her own peril, let her beware!"

He wrote back, applauding: "Well, that is all right. If Lady Indignant is a devotee of the Great *Cha*[*] Devi—she will fly and throw herself on the altar without need of urging: if not, she will sit in tealess meditation, invitation-free. As for chivalry, however, it is more than a century ago that Burke lamented: 'The days of chivalry are gone'! And in the year of grace, 1932, with feminism triumphant everywhere—except in France and Bokhara—how do you propose to keep the cult going any longer?"

* * *

Sometimes—just for fun—we wrote to him telegraphically even though it bordered upon irreverence if not blasphemy. Here is a sample.

"O Guru," I dashed off, "I send you a Bengali poem of mine entitled *Akuti* which I translated last night int English. Can you revise it? Is it good? Mediocre Worthless? Frank opinion, please! But what abou Raihana's letter? Won't return? You keep mum. What' up? Bridge-building? Supramental? Wool-gathering?

His repartee came, as echo to song:

"I shall see if I can get a few minutes for revising you English translation. But you seem to have progresse greatly in your English verse—(How so quickly? Yog

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[*] *Cha,* in Bengali, means tea.

Force? Internal combustion? The subliminal self?) Raihana's letter and drawing which have unaccountably turned up again with me. (Poltergeist? Your inadvertence? Mine?)"

* * *

"O Guru," I wrote, "I could not meditate of late, thanks to mountains of proofs. But soon I will start like Pahari Baba. So beware!"

He answered it promptly the next day:

"After mountains of proof the mountain of meditation, with you, the BABA, on top? All right: I am ready to face it."

* * *

"O Guru," I wrote, "three solid pieces of jolly news: first, a Muslim writer named Abul Fazl comes to congratulate me because in my recent controversy with Tagore, he opines, the latter had very much the worst of it. Then comes a savant who praises my Bengali novel, *Dola*. Last, though not least, turns up a Zamindar who implores me to draft for him an address for a local doctor who has been honoured by a Rajah. Now tell me, do you smile on it or frown?"

He wrote back: 'I sympathise. Three cheers for Abul Fazl and the savant. But I don't feel enthusiastic about the doctor even though honoured by a Rajah! What are things coming to! (Please don't tell this to Nirod). Perhaps, however, it may be on the principle: 'Honour the doctor that thy life may be long in the land!' But then to call in an eminent litterateur like you is after all appropriate. You can furnish them with a long address on the romance of medicine beginning with Dhanwantari, Charaka and Galen and ending with Nirod Taluqdar or Dr. Ramchandra."

* * *

When his correspondence in our Ashram increased to unconscionable proportions and he had to deal with them all by himself night after night from 9 p.m. till 5 a.m. the next morning, Mother intervened and decided that henceforth only *a few* were to be allowed to write to him, by *special* permission. But as the number of the privileged ones mounted day by day, I wrote one day to him (1935):

"To how many have you given a special permission to write to you daily? Nirod confided to me—it's 121. Bindu says—impossible, it is only 97, out of the present total 150."

The reply came:

"The number openly accepted is two by tacit understanding, two by express notice and two by self-given permission. If it had been 97 or 121 I would have translated myself to the Gobi desert or the Lake Manasa in the style of Sri Bijoy Krishna Goswami."

* * *

"O Guru," I wrote once, "Lady Demure insists on being deeply shocked whenever somebody is caught lying, forgetting that she lies herself—as often as not. But then we *all* lie, Guru! So why are we so profoundly shocked when others repeat our favorite pastime? Please elucidate."

"Lies?" he wrote back. "Well, a Punjabi student at Cambridge once took our breath away by the frankness and comprehensive profundity of his affirmation: 'Liars! But we are all liars!' It appeared that he had intended to say 'lawyers,' but his pronunciation gave his remark a deep force of philosophic observation and generalisation which he had not intended! But it seems to me the last word on human nature. Only the lying is sometimes intentional, sometimes vaguely half-intentional, sometimes quite unintentional, momentary and unconscious. So there you are!"

* * *

"O Guru," I confided, "Mr. Cocksure harangued me for nearly half-an-hour that he feels a wonderful power astir in him day and night leading him to a wonderful self-surrender! I am impressed. Aren't you?"

On this he commented:

"When he speaks of the power in him and his self-surrender—well, one can only wish that if and when people are so wonderful, they might as well be a trifle less eloquent about their wonderfulness. One never knows to what this excessive self-appreciation will lead and the past examples do not encourage."

* * *

"O Guru", I communicated, "Mr. Effusive, who is an admirer of yours has just sent me a Bengali poem which he implores me to sing to you 'without fail'. But I wonder how you would react to it if I complied, for he has in effect sounded the death-knell of Rishihood, calling you virtually the last of the Romans. I will translate into English only the opening couplet so that Mother may also know, just to be forewarned:

'Glory to thee, O wistful India's last and lingering seer!
Let me expire with thee, my Lord, who never more shalt appear.'

One hardly knows whether one should be laughing or whether weeping is here *de rigueur?* What do you say? And he wants your blessings, too, remember!"

"Dilip," Gurudev admonished, "you don't understand! What he means is that my *shishyagan* (disciples) will all become supermen; ergo, there can be no possible chance of any such small thing as a Rishi (seer) appearing again —I am positively the last of that crowd. All the same, you may send him my blessings—he deserves it richly for giving us such a gorgeous prospect."

* * *

"O Guru," I wrote after reading two autobiographies which set me thinking once again, "in Yoga, prayers have, I understand, a very important function to fulfil even when they are of the petitionary brand. In his reminiscences entitled *Vale* Dean Inge says, with true humility, that although the pearl of great price is only for those few who stake their all for the All-in-all, yet no sincere prayer is unheard. But then, I ask myself, why is there so much preventible misery when *les miserables* keep praying—at any rate a large proportion of them do. I have seen myself so many praying and praying till they are blue in the face but nothing happened! Dean Inge may assert that his prayers have been heard often enough, but what about Jawaharlalji who writes, equally categorically, that he has often enough been just thirsty for a little peace but to no purpose? No wonder his scepticism is reinforced about a Divine Ordainer and he goes on fuming against the religious. To the seer mystic his indictments may seem crude and superficial, but can one say that he really is as childish as he seems, since he does not, alas, want to dive deeper and so remains where he is, admiring Gandhiji (I believe, sincerely?) and yet poohpoohing his profoundest impulse—towards mysticism! Or is it because he simply hankered for peace—but never prayed?"

"As for prayer," he wrote back, "no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. The eldest daughter of my maternal uncle, Sri Krishna Kumar Mitra (the editor of Sanjivani—not by any means a romantic, occult, supra-physical or even an imaginative person) was abandoned by the doctors after using every resource, all medicines stopped as useless. The father said: 'There is only God now, let us pray.' He did and from that moment the girl began to recover, the typhoid fever and all symptoms fled, death also. I know of any number of cases like that. Well? You may ask why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they? It is not a machinery: put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole if he had to grant all of them; it wouldn't do. As for Jawaharlal, he has perhaps something in his temperament that might answer to the supraphysical, but by his intellect he has so put it down that it is not likely to act in any overt manner."

* * *

"O Guru," I appealed. "Lady Indignant is again down on us, males! She says man is such a foul seducer and poor woman (poor? a modern woman? good Lord!) such a guileless, simple and trustful tendril! I retaliated in banter and reminded her what Tagore had sighed over in the 'twenties: 'We are a much maligned sex, Dilip! The fair maid complains that we pursue and harry her. But between you and me, do you think that the most leonine of lions dare approach a woman if she *really* frowned upon his advances?' So adjudicate, Guru: who tempts first—man or woman? Or shall we say *a la* Sir Roger de Coverley: 'Much can be said on both sides?' "

"Dilip," he answered, "it is six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. To throw it all on woman is Adamism. To ignore the man's part is feminism. Both are in error. Yes, Sir Roger is right."

* * *

"O Guru," wailed the Man of Sorrows in me. "So be it. Since I have been hanging too long in mid-air and must land somewhere somehow, anyhow—therefore I propose—subject to your approval—a drastic prescription for my long-suffering unconvalescing self.

"Number one. I will give up tea: I love it.

"Number two. I will do without cheese: I adore it.

"Number three. I wil bid adieu to tasty dishes and start periodic fasts.

"Number four. Will forswear hair-oil and shave my head. (I was not baldish in those days).

"Number five. I will sleep on one sole blanket, pillowless. But note: I tried this before already and remember that although you have kept me in reasonable comfort, I came ready to brave any austerity.

"Number six. I will sleep without the mosquito-curtain which, I fear, will be the most difficult of all feats because I have never been able to equate the crooning of the mosquito with a lullaby.

"Only believe me when I say that although I move this resolution in a language that may sound unparliamentary, my heart is really heavy and tearful, since I can see no shorter cut to salvation. So, in the circumstances, will you and the Mother ratify my resolution, or amend, please?"

My letter was dated September 14, 1935.

He wrote back precipitately: "I stand aghast as I stare at the detailed proposals made by you! Fastings? I don't believe in them, though I have done them myself. You would really eat like an ogre afterwards. Shaved head? Great heavens! Have you realised the consequences? I pass over the aesthetic shock to myself at *darshan* on the 24th November from which I might never recover—but the row that would rise from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas! You would be famous in a new way which would cast all your previous glories into the shade. And just when you are turning away from fame and all the things of the ego! No: too dangerous by half. Sleep without the mosquito-net? That would mean no sleep, which is as bad as no food. Not only your eyes would become weak, but yourself also—and, to boot, gloomy, grey and gruesome—more gruesome than the Supramental of your worst apprehensions! No and NO again. As for the rest, I placed some of them before the Mother and she eyed them without favour.

"After all, real asceticism is hardly possible except in a hut or in the Himalayas. The heart of asceticism, besides, is having no desires or attachments, being indifferent, able to do without things, satisfied with whatever comes. If you 'asceticise' outwardly, it becomes a rule of life and you keep it up because it is a rule, for the principle of the thing or for the *kudos* of it—as a point of honour. But I have noticed about ascetics by rule that when you remove the curb they become just like others—barring a few exceptions, of course—which proves that the transformation was not real. A more subtle method used by some is to give up for a time, then try the object of desire again and so go on till you have thoroughly tested yourself; e.g., you give up your potatoes and eat only the Ashram food for a time—if the call comes for the potatoes or from them, then you are not cured: if no call comes, still you cannot be sure till you have tried potatoes again, and seen whether the desire, attachment or sense of need revives. If it does not and the potatoes fall away from you of themselves, then there is some hope that the thing is done.

"However, all this will make you think that I am hardly fit to be a Guru in the path of asceticism and you will probably be right. You see, *I have a strong penchant for the inner working* and am persuaded that if you give the psychic a chance it will rid you of the impediments you chafe at without all this sternness and trouble."

"O Guru," I replied, "I thank you sincerly for refusing assent to my doom. And yet, paradoxically, I feel a definite disappointment, too, along with the relief. For I had a lurking suspicion that your Supramental wisdom might still be wanting to impose asceticism on me since I have, willy-nilly, to practise your *Supramental* Yoga and no other; so I decided, after a mighty wrench, to ban everything my *mental* loved or even approved of. But now you yourself are turning down my proposal to conquer attachments which are holding me up. I repeat, however, that I am still 'game' if you reconsider your veto to give me another trial."

To that he replied next morning:

"But how in the earthly did you get this strange idea that we were pressing asceticism on you? When? How? Where? I only admitted it as a possibility after repeated assertions from you that you wanted to do this formidable thing, and it was with great heart-searchings and terrible apprehensive visions of an ascetic Dilip with wild weird eyes and in loin-cloth, eating groundnuts and nails and sleeping on iron-spikes in the presence of a dumbfounded Lord Shiva! I never prescribed the thing to you at all: it was *you* who were clamouring for it, so I gave in and tried to make the best of it, hoping that you would think better of it. As for the Mother, the first time she heard of it she knocked it off with the most emphatic 'Nonsense!' possible. In fact what you proposed was even more formidable than my vision—a shaven-headed and mosquito-bitten Dilip in loin-cloth and the rest (not that you actually proposed the last but it is the logical outcome of the devastating shave!). Conquest of attachment is quite a different matter—one has to learn to take one's tea and potatoes without weeping for them or even missing them if they are not there. But we have repeatedly said that you could go on with them and need not follow the way taken by others. As to seclusion, I have written my distrust of retirement several times: it is only a few people who can do it and profit, but they are not a rule for others. . . . If I am living in my room it is not out of a passion for solitude. . . . So you need not be anxious: solitude is not demanded of you, for an ascetic dryness or isolated loneliness cannot be your destiny since it is not consonant with your *swabhava* (nature) which is made for joy, largeness, expansion, a comprehensive movement of the life-force. So your subtle interpretation of our intentions or wishes was a bad misfit. However, all is well that ends well and in spite of your suggestion of being 'game' I will consider the danger over. *Laus Deo!*"

* * *

The Maharaja of Dewas who was then a refugee in Pondichery once invited me to dinner. Gurudev wrote:

"I hope your dinner did not turn out like my first taste of Maharatta cookery—when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody went to my neighbour, a Maharatta Professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. O God! Sudden fire in the mouth could not have been more cataclysmic! Enough to bring down the whole of London in one agonised sweep of flame!"

To be serious again.

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I wrote to him once quoting from Vivekananda. Did he not often decry the faith of the formal kind which, he was wont to say, was partly responsible for our decadence? But there was a snag here, I added, in that condemning people often engendered a sort of sense of self-superiority: was not that why the traditionalists accused Vivekananda of superciliousness if not actual conceit? Tolerance should be fostered, should it not?

He answered me with a long letter:

"As for the sense of superiority, that is a little difficult to avoid when greater horizons open before the consciousness, unless one is already of a saintly and humble disposition. There are men like Nag Mahashya (among Sri Ramkrishna's disciples) in whom spiritual experience creates more and more humility; there are others, like Vivekananda, in whom it creates a great sense of strength and superiority—European critics have taxed him with it rather severely; there are others in whom it fixes a sense of superiority to men and humility to the Divine. Each position has its value. Take Vivekananda's famous answer to the Madras Pundit who objected to one of his assertions, saying: 'But Shankara does not say so'. Vivekananda replied: "No, but *I, Vivekananda, say so,*' and the Pundit was speechless. That 'I, Vivekananda' stands up to the ordinary eye like a Himalaya of self-confident egoism. But there is nothing false or unsound in Vivekananda's spiritual experience. For this was not egoism, but the sense of what he stood for and the attitude of the fighter who, as the representative of something very great, could not allow himself to be put down or belittled. This is not to deny the necessity of non-egoism and spiritual humility, but to show that the question is not so easy as it appears at first sight. For if I have to express my spiritual experiences I must do that with truth—I must record them with their *bhava,* their thoughts, feelings, extensions of consciousness which accompany them. What am I to do with the experience in which one feels the whole world in oneself or the force of the Divine flowing in one's being and nature or the certitude of one's faith against all doubts or doubters or one's oneness with the Divine or the smallness of human thought and life compared with this greater knowledge and existence? And I have to use the word 'I'—I cannot take refuge in saying 'this body' or 'this appearance', especially as I am not a *Mayavadin*. Shall I not, therefore, fall into an expression which may make some shake their heads at my assertions as full of pride and ego? I imagine it would be difficult to avert it.

"Another thing: it seems to me that you identify faith very much with mental belief, but real faith is something spiritual, a knowledge of the soul. What you quote in your letters are the hard assertions of mental belief leading to a vehement vindication of one's mental creed and goal because they are one's own and must therefore be greater than those of others—an attitude which is universal in human nature. Even the atheist is not tolerant but declares his credo of Nature and Matter as the *only* truth and on all who disbelieve or believe in other things he pours scorn as unenlightened morons and superstitious half-wits. I bear him no grudge for thinking me that, but I note that this attitude is not confined to religious faith but is equally natural to those who are free from religious faith and do not believe in Gods and Gurus. You will not, I hope, mind my putting the other side of the question; I want to point out that there *is* the other side, that there is much more to be said than at first sight appears."

Another trait of his character impressed me even though with time I came to take it for granted, as it were. It was his reluctance to impose his views on others. He semed almost always like pleading for his case, even when it was obvious that the other's was untenable if only from the point of view of logic. To give one instance. A princess once came to the Ashram as my guest. She was fond of music and asked me to sing to her. I readily agreed and told her that I would have a regular musical *soiree* for her the next evening. Next morning her secretary came to me and asked a number of searching questions in the course of which he gave me to understand that the princess could not possibly sit in the same room with other *sadhakas* whereupon I bluntly retorted: "Tell her then that she need not come. For I feel very strongly that this is not *her* State but an Ashram where we all have the same status, and so if she insists on being received with special deference I must decline to sing to such a person."

Next morning she called on me in person, wanting to explain. But I refused to see her. This was reported to Gurudev by a busybody who was aghast that I should have been impolite if not insulting to a rich and beautiful princess! Gurudev, however, smiled and sent word to me that not only was I right in my stand but that I had his full support, because every *sadhaka* had a perfect right to solitude if and when he did not feel like receiving visitors. (The princess came after all and I sang to her as she explained that it was all due to an unfortunate misunderstanding engineered by the same busybody).

But it so happened that a few months later a *gurubhai* was rude to a visitor. I quickly forgot my own similar misdemeanour and wrote to Gurudev condemning the delinquent out of hand. I asked whether spiritual realisation ought not to make people humble and courteous rather than rude and boorish. This time he reprimanded me politely, but firmly:

"But when on earth were politeness and good society manners considered as a part or a test of spiritual experience or true yogic *siddhi*. It is no more a test than the capacity of dancing well or dressing nicely. Just as there are very good and kind men who are boorish and rude in their manners, so there may be very spiritual men (I mean here by spiritual men those who have had deep spiritual experiences) who have no grasp over physical life or action (many intellectuals too, by the way, are like that) and are not at all careful about their manners. I suppose I myself am accused of rude and arrogant behaviour because I refuse to see people, do not answer letters, and a host of other misdemeanours. I have heard of a famous recluse who threw stones at anybody coming to his retreat because he did not want disciples and found no other way of warding off the flood of candidates. I at least would hesitate to pronounce that such people had no spiritual life or experience. Certainly, I prefer that *sadhakas* should be reasonably considerate towards each other, but that is for the rule of collective life and harmony, not as a *siddhi* of the Yoga or an indispensable sign of inner experience.

"And then how can the *ecarts* of the *sadhakas* here, none of whom has reached perfection or is anywhere near it, be a proof that spiritual experience is null? You write as if the moment one had any kind of spiritual experience or realisation, one must at once become a perfect person without defects or weaknesses. That is to make a demand which it is impossible to satisfy and it is to ignore the fact that spiritual life is a growth and not a sudden and inexplicable miracle. No *sadhaka* can be judged as if he were already a *siddha* Yogi, least of all those who have only travelled a quarter or less of a very long path as is the case with most who are here. Even great Yogis do not claim perfection and you cannot say that because they are not absolutely perfect, therefore their spirituality is false or of no use to the world. There are, besides, all kinds of spiritual men: some who are content with spiritual experience and do not seek after an outward perfection or progress, some who are saints, others who do not seek after sainthood, others who are content to live in the cosmic consciousness in touch or union with the All but allowing all kinds of forces to fly through them, e.g. in the typical description of the Paramhansa. The ideal I put before our Yoga is one thing but it does not bind all spiritual life and endeavour. The spiritual life is not a thing that can be formulated in a rigid definition or bound by a fixed mental rule; it is a vast field of evolution, an immense kingdom potentially larger than the other kingdoms below it, with a hundred provinces, a thousand types, stages, forms, paths, variations of the spiritual ideal, degrees of spiritual advancement. It is from the basis of this truth, which I will explain in subsequent letters, that things regarding spirituality and its seekers must be judged, if they are to be judged with knowledge. It is only by so understanding it that one can understand it truly, either in its past or in its future or put in their place the spiritual men of the past and the present or relate the different ideals, stages, etc. thrown up in the spiritual evolution of the human being."

But as he knew to his cost what human nature was and how liable to be heading for disaster in its cussed moods, he always tried to efface promptly the aftermath of a *froissement* which even a gentle correction often brought in its train. So, over and over again he came out with the salve of his humour and irony after having dealt a blow. I could not help admiring this as a token of his unfailing understanding of the hurdles of the ego we had to negotiate when, willy-nilly, we had to accept an unpalatable dressing-down for the purge of our egoism. For example, after one such gentle rebuke he went out of his way to plead for his inability to finish two promised letters in the small hours of the morning—one for myself and one for a friend of mine whom I had sponsored.

"The lights went out, the lights went out!" he hastened to write on the following morning. "So I have to wait till tomorrow. Man proposes but the Pondichery Municipality disposes. But there will be grace tomorrow, Pondichery Municipality *volente*." Then he went on to add the same night: "Joy! Joy! Joy!!! I have done it—both letters written—done they are this time!"

* * *

But in spite of all the latitude he gave me, I found corrections hard to bear as I was hypersensitive by constitution. Consequently he had to spare me and often weigh his words in a way he would not even dream of doing when dealing with, say, Nirod or Rajani. For he knew that these would not mind whatever it was that came to them from him. To each according to his need, as he explained to me once in answer to a question of mine about consistency.

"It is a little difficult," he wrote, "from the wider, spiritual outlook to answer your question in the way you want and every mental being wants, with a trenchant 'Thou-shalt' or 'Thou-shalt-not'—especially when the *thou* is meant to cover *all*. For while there is an identity of essential aim, while there are general broad lines of endeavour, yet there is not in detail one common set of rules in inner things that can apply to *all* seekers. You ask: 'Is not such and such a thing harmful?' But what is harmful to one may be helpful to another; what is harmful under certain conditions may be helpful under other conditions; what is done in a certain spirit may be disastrous, while the same thing done in a different spirit would be innocuous or even beneficial. I asked the Mother what she would say to your question about pleasures and social experiences (put as a general question) and she answered: 'Impossible to say like that: it depends on the spirit in which it is done.' So there are many things: the spirit, the circumstances, the person, the need and cast of the nature ...... that is also the reason why we say that the Divine cannot be understood by the mind, because the mind acts according to hard and fast rules and standards, while the spirit sees the truth of all and the truth of each and acts variously according to its own comprehensive and complex vision. That is also why we say that no one can understand by his personal mental judgment the Mother's actions and reasons for action: it can only be understood by entering into the larger consciousness from which she sees things and acts upon them. That is baffling to the mind because it uses its small mental measures, but that is the truth of the matter."

And I may add that that is also why he revealed at every step a new facet of his unfathomable personality to us all—to each according to his temperament. For example, to Nirod he would constantly assume a tone he never once assumed with me. To illustrate what I mean:

"Nirod," he wrote on one occasion, "as there are several lamentations today besieging me, I have very little time to deal with each separate jeremiad. But do I understand rightly that your contention is: 'I can't believe in the Divine doing everything for me because it is by my own mighty and often fruitless efforts that I write poetry and have made myself into a poet?' Well, that itself is *epatant*, magnificent and unheard-of! It has always been supposed since the infancy of the human race that while a verse-maker can be made or self-made, a poet cannot. *Poet a nascitur non fit*—a poet is born not made, is a dictum that has come down through the centuries and millenniums and was thundered into my ears by the first pages of my Latin grammar. The facts of literary history seem to justify this stern saying. But here in Pondichery we have tried, not to manufacture poets, but to give them birth, a spiritual not a physical birth, into the body. In a number of instances we are supposed to have succeeded —one of them is your noble self, or if I am to believe the Man of Sorrows in you—your abject, miserable, hopeless and ineffectual self. But how was it done? There are two theories, it seems: one that it was done by the Yogic Force, the other that it was done by your splashing, kicking, groaning Herculean efforts. Now, Sir, if it is the latter, if you have done the unprecedented thing, made yourself by your own laborious strength into a poet (for your earlier efforts were only very decent literary exercises), then, Sir, why the deuce are you so abject, self-depreciatory and miserable? Don't say that it is only a poet who can produce no more than a few poems in as many months. Even to have done that, to have become a poet at all, a self-made poet, is a miracle over which one can only say 'Bravo! Bravo!' without ever stopping. If your efforts could do that what is there that it can't do? All miracles can be effected by it and a giant, self-confident faith is the only logical conclusion. So either way, there is room only for Halleujah, none for jeremiads.

"The fact that you don't feel a force does not prove that it isn't there. The steam engine does not feel a force moving it, but the force is there for all that. A man is not a steam engine? He is very little better, for he is conscious only of some bubbling on the surface which he calls 'himself' and is absolutely unconscious of all the subconscient, subliminal, superconscient forces moving him. (This is a fact which is being more and more established by modern psychology though it has got hold only of the lower forces and not the higher, so you need not turn up your rational nose at it). He twitters intellectually and foolishly about the surface results and attributes them all to his 'noble self', ignoring the fact that this noble self is hidden far away from his own vision behind the cell of his dimly sparkling intellect and the reeling fog of his vital feelings, emotions, impulses, sensations and impressions. So your arguments are utterly absurd and futile. Our aim is to bring the secret forces out and unwalled into the open so that instead of getting some shadows or lightnings of themselves out through the veil or being wholly obstructed, they may pour down and flow in a river. But to expect all that at once is a presumptuous demand which shows an impatient ignorance and inexperience. If they begin to trickle at first, that is sufficient to justify the faith in the downpour. You admit that you once or twice felt a force coming down and delivering a poem out of you (your opinion about its worth or worthlessness is not worth a cent: that is for others to pronounce); that is sufficient to blow your jeremiad to smithereens; it proves that the force was and is there and at work and it is only your sweating Herculean labour that prevents you feeling it. Also it is the trickle that gives assurance of the possibility of the downpour. One has only to go on and by one's patience deserve the downpour or else, without derserving, slide on until one gets it. In Yoga itself the experience that is a promise and foretaste but gets shut off till the nature is ready for the fulfilment is a phenomenon familiar to every Yogi when he looks back on his past experience. Such were the brief visitations of *ananda* you have had sometimes before. It does not matter if you have not a 'leechlike tenacity'—leeches are not the only type of Yogis. If you can stick anyhow or get stuck—that is sufficient. The fact that you are not Sri Aurobindo (who said you were?) is an inept irrelevance. One needs to be only oneself in a reasonable way and shake off the hump when it is there or allow it to be shaken off without clinging to it with a leech-like tenacity worthy of a better cause. . . .

"What are you to do? Dig yourself out if you can; if you can't, call for ropes and wait till they come. If 'God knows what will happen when the Grace descends,' that should be enough, shouldn't it? That you don't know is a fact which may be baffling to your—well, *your* intelligence, but is not of great importance, any more than your supposed unfitness."

* * *

But though he could go on like this—sparring, reminiscing and scintillating if and when the spirit so moved him, few people who have known him will disagree with my estimate that he was essentially a man of deep reserve, a denizen of the deeps. It reminds me of a joke I had with him nearly fifteen years ago. On three (and later four) occasions in the year when he used to come out for us as well as the visitors, we used to take a look at him, but not, alas, a long look. His eyes rested on each of us but for a few seconds—because the whole procedure had to be concluded in about a couple of hours. On me he used to shed a kind glance but I searched his face in vain for a smile. I was, indeed, impressed by his grave face, but I missed the smile of a friendly recognition which made to me all the difference in the world. When he came to know of my disappointment he did try to change but, equally, in vain. At all events, that was my impression, I insisted. But a lady who happened to be next to me (and who could, without turning a hair, beat me in the game of insistence with a handicap) drove me to the wall asseverating that he *had* smiled at me. So I wrote to him more in shame than in sorrow. "O Guru! here you put me out of countenance once more—possibly to pulverize the last vestiges of my self-confidence. For Lady Emphatic swears—and none can outswear her, as you know—that she saw your lips bend into a curve which can only be equated with a smile. So it follows, as the rain the drought, that I have forfeited even the right to believe in the testimony of my own senses, or is it that you only gave me a Supramental smile? If so, why did you waste such a boon on us, humans, whose mentality cannot possibly recognise it as such?"

To that he wrote back: "But Lady Emphatic is right. For I did indeed smile—though it was not the broad smile of a Tagore or the childlike smile of a Gandhi. But I assure you I will try to be more convincing in future." (He did later—and succeeded, God be praised!)

But when—and here is my point—even his smile had to be noisily mooted before one could be convinced as to its authenticity, how could one call him anything but a reserved man?

And yet he was talking to me as to a "*friend and a son*" and to Nirod like an old comrade whom he almost invited to give him as much as he got! This I found a little difficult to account for and yet I feel I can safely assert that when he wrote his letters to us two, it did seem as though a lid had been suddenly lifted: the old trite simile of a stone-slab covering a natural spring often recurred to my mind! Somehow, with us two he was as free as free can be. But today I cannot help feeling somewhat conscience-stricken because I realise that I could not rightfully claim what I clamoured for, to wit, utter frankness on his part: I have become conscious as never before, that my way of reacting to his frankness was nowhere near what it ought to have been.

For what was it that did happen as against what could and ought to have happened? It would not, indeed, be untrue to claim that I had come to serve him, having previously responded to his call for self-transformation. But in the uphill path of Yoga a mere pious intention does not, alas, carry one very far: one has to be resolutely ruthless with one's ego if one really wants to be sincere to a purpose. I have all along taken not a little pride in my honesty and sincerity, little realising that the truly honest aspirant in Yoga is he alone who is sleeplessly self-critical, who is bent on giving no quarter to the promptings of his self-will—that everlasting pander of self-love. Today when the one whose deep compassion was so eager to help me out of the ego's clutches is no more, this thought has become fraught with an added poignancy in that it has enabled me to see clearly how I *could* have reacted to his tireless exhortations to outgrow my egotism—if only I *would*—by choosing to be a little more docile and humble. But perhaps it was my overweening self-confidence harnessed to an ineradicable pride in the sanity of my rational nature and demands that wrought my downfall again and again. (Isn't our rational pride often blinder than purblind faith?) To give a rather convincing instance, if only to illustrate how I hampered him at every turn by constraining him to waste his precious time for the redemption of the Old Adam in me:

"I got your first letter," he wrote once in the heyday of my self-will, "and as I always look at yours if there is any and leave the rest aside for later reading, I sat down after my daily walk and concentration to answer it. I missed your second 'urgent' letter altogether and came to know of it after I had seen the third—later in the night. If I had had it, I would of course have answered it at once. I am sorry you have had to wait the whole night without an answer.

"I was a little taken aback by the first letter, for my remarks about W had been perfectly casual and I attached little importance to them when I wrote them. I would certainly not have written them if I had thought they were of a kind to cause trouble to you. In scribbling them I had no idea of imposing my views about W on you—I had no idea of writing as a Guru to a disciple or laying down the law, it was rather as a friend to a friend expressing my ideas and discussing them with a perfect ease and confidence. Both the Mother and myself have a natural tendency to speak or write to you in that way, expressing the idea that comes without measuring of terms or any *arriere-pensee* because we feel close to your psychic being always and that is the relation we have quite naturally with you. That was why I wrote like that and I had no other intention in me.

"I do not believe in human judgments because I have always found them fallible—also because I have myself been so blackened by human judgments that I do not care to be guided by them with regard to others. All this, however, I write to explain my own point of view; I am not insisting on it as a law for others. I have not been in the habit of insisting that everybody must think as I do—any more than I insist on everybody following me and my Yoga.

"All that to brush aside what is an evident misunderstanding. Now about X Y Z, you should remember that what I wrote about them was not an after-invention or an idea formed as a result of their going away—all that I wrote about X, for instance, I had written long before he went—and also with the others I had not refrained from letting them know what was wrong with them, except for Y and Z with whom it was not necessary. I did not wholeheartedly assure and praise and encourage while they were there nor wholeheartedly damn when they were gone. Nor would I have said anything about them if I had not been questioned from every side. Why then should you think that I would attack you if you went away—you, to whom I have always spoken with encouragement and kindness, and never, I think, with severe disapprobation or warning as I did with X Y Z? I should write, if I had to write, what I have always said to you: 'Dilip had his difficulties, and he was gradually surmounting them, but his one great difficulty of doubt and self-distrust he did not meet sufficiently'; and I would add: 'and in a weak moment he has allowed it to carry him away. But he will find that he can discover his soul here alone and then he will return.'

"But all that is really unnecessary since you are not, like X Y Z, consumed with the desire to go or feeling the call for action elsewhere. But why this constant slipping back to the idea of failure? Why this idea that I am offended? Have I ever taken offence or evinced any least idea of giving you up? How is it you still lend credence to a suggestion your whole experience of our relations contradicts? Your attacks of doubt and self-distrust are a weakness I have taken account of and I refuse to consider it as a bar to your arrival at the goal. It is in all sincerity that I affirm your possibilities."

But as the blackest clouds have a silver lining, I console myself today with this thought that even my wrongest moods did serve a twofold purpose: first, objectively, because they brought into relief his great understanding of and compassion for human nature which insists, suicidally, on smiting the hand that comes to save (an understanding that had made him write once to me: "*My experience shows that human beings are much less deliberate and responsible for their acts than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them and I look rather to see what forces drove them than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed—our inferences are often wrong and even when they are right touch only the surface of the matter*") and then subjectively, because it can hardly be gainsaid that had I been by nature less intractable than I was, I might, indeed, have been richer today in Yogic experience, but should I not have been ever so much poorer in my intimate knowledge of that human side of him which is so infinitely precious to me: the human in the Divine that made Krishna what He was to the grateful Pandavas—not only the Guru and Pilot but the Friend and Sentinel as well who all but broke his pledge in the Kurukshetra and sprang out to slay Bhishma when he found his protege Arjuna's life in danger? A Muslim friend of mine recited once a Persian couplet which I translated in one of my bright moods of gratefulness and exaltation which made me feel vividly that even failure in a great endeavour was far preferable to success in little ambitions:

When I waste my years to win thee, friend,
'Tis then I best achieve my end:
Only that life was rich in gain
Which strove and strove for thee in vain.

* * *

And it was just such another exalted mood of mine inspired by my gratefulness for the right to his indulgence which evoked, to my joy, one of his rarest sallies—a mood, alas, which his life-long preoccupation with us, dolorous dwarfs, made it all but impossible for him to give vent to more often. I shall quote it not only to end on a happy not but also for the sheer delight of revealing him in an impulse of unbridled laughter and fun which will, I hope, be welcome to all who cherish the memory of his lovelit personality. It happened like this.

It was in 1934, a few days before his birthday, the 15th August. I was reading out to Chadwick a letter of his which he had just written to me in answer to my importunities.

"Sonnets?" he wrote. "I have no time for writing sonnets—my energy is too occupied with very urgent and pressing things—quite apart from correspondence—to 'dally with the rhythmic line'."

We were both cursing away in our hearts the utter wryness of this providential dispensation and wondering about the nature of his "pressing" work in hand when Gurudev's secretary brought me a telegram to Gurudev which read: 'Wire permission for your Darshan on the fifteenth of August. Dilip, my friend, will recommend me—

Aurobindo.' On the margin was written in Gurudev's handwriting: "Please recommend and enlighten."

It was just that little query which, happily, made the wicked Goddess—*Dushta Saraswati*—fall plump and perch on my irreverent tongue. I dashed off then and there a Bengali poem which I sent up to Gurudev hoping, against hope, to draw him out. Here is an English translation of my wicked burlesque:

You ask me, Guru, who is this Aurobindo who desires to come
To have your blessing on your birthday? I would rather now be dumb:
Because, I find, I know four personalities distinct and great
Who are your namesakes and so wonder how to place this candidate!
So I'll recount the deeds of each still graven in my memory,
For your Supramental may shed light where I grope rayless hopelessly!

The first was an aristocrat whose toilette very few dare eclipse:
He combed his curls for hours—a dandy, out and out, to his finger-tips,
Enamoured of pomatum, powder, silks and scents and fineries,
He blithely hummed to all and sundry India's amorous melodies.
Work he abhorred, yet such is fate—he was given a mill to supervise,
But he resigned and married pelf—not less resourceful than he was wise!
It is not likely—but who knows—perhaps your mystic call he hears!
And, sick at last of the world's brief tinkles, aches for the music of the spheres!

Then number two: he'd fallen in love with one he called 'his dream of love
Come true on earth'—but she, alas, proved subtle whom no romance could move.
She smiled on him as Frau von Stein once smiled on Goethe: did not she
Invite the Poet?—but then "Oh no, not too close," said she warningly!
Only, while Goethe had for his flame to pay in poems, not in gold:
This modern 'Pickwick' gave her with his 'love-sick' heart his cash untold.
Then, bankrupt, hugging me in London blubbered he between his tears:
"O kindred spirit, who but you can ever divine what my heart sears?"
You never can tell—perhaps he has since read your message of the One
Who can tell why love is doomed to shadows, and never a place wins in the sun?

Your namesake, number three, a youth who lived in Paris by his wits,
Took me in tow and showed me round the Eternal city's sweet retreats.
A specialist in gossip about prophets, poets and actresses,
"What is unknown to me," he bragged, "is not worth while—I know what pays."
And he made me know it too although I did pay what I could for him,
As he would clarify what to my mind had seemed intriguing, dim.
Maybe his "knowledge" has let him down and so he longs for a greater light
Than his continental firefly twinkles—helpless in his soul's dark night!

The last though not least, O great Master, of your namesakes was so brave

That we all stood aghast when, after lecturing "each his soul must save",
He wooed a Belgian old maid who though not so wise as Solomon
Was even as rich and "game" when he led her to the altar in Boulogne.
I had to be his best man thought no bridesmaids were available,
But the great philosopher announced: "Without love even Heaven were hell!"
So the saviour angel of his soul led him to the turf in a mystic glee
And then in the heaven of Monte Carlo gambled and lost exultantly.
I wonder: could his Eden elect have failed him in the last resort?
Else how could his brave ship want now to come to your supramental port?

I know not human destiny, nor your celestial mysteries.
I only know your regal soul rich with the starry secrecies.
So I implore: O make me see the greatness of your namesakes now,
Say, how come they to bear your name and yet stay where they are—Oh how?
Just one thing more: what shall I answer?—and please tell me his address.
I dare not recommend all, Guru, though all *you* can lean to bless.
And lastly O Compassionate, forgive my dread frivolity:
To have laughed at those who bear your name? Oh, damn me not everlastingly.

Chadwick chuckled when I read this out to him, but shook his head. "It's unlikely to draw him out, Dilip," he sighed. "He's too busy. But I do wish you the best of luck."

Next day, however, I ran to him, for the miracle did happen—Gurudev did reply.

"Dilip," we read together, "Your epic of the four Aurobindos is luminous, informing and hair-raising! But there can be no doubt about who this Aurobindo is—it is, I presume, Aurobindo the fourth, 'a doer of dreadful deeds'. I am referring to the phrase *bhimakarma Brikodara,**—However a truce to unseemly jests; let us come to grave practical matters.

"His address? How in the name of the wonderful am I to know? His address in the telegram is 'Aurobindo, Bombay' just as mine might be 'Aurobindo, Pondichery'. In his previous letter he wrote that he was going to Bombay and would waltz from there straight to Pondichery. He may have given his Bombay address but I don't think so. Nolini who has his letter can perhaps enlighten you. I do not know whether he expects us to put him up—I suppose not, since although he is Aurobindo, Aurobindo does not know him from Adam. However, what I am doing is to send you his reply-paid telegram form and shove my responsibility on your shoulders. You will decide these according to the ripe wisdom of your many Aurobindonian experience. Whether you wire 'come and be blessed' or 'stay where you are in your Eden'—is your shout—I back out. To sum the matter up in two far-flowing Alexandrine couplets:

Tell him, by wire: 'Come on' with a benignant nod,
Or leave him journeying to the devil or to God,
Decide for the other Aurobindo what you please,
This namesake-flooded Aurobindo leave at ease.

"In fact my Supermind is almost staggering helpless to make any decision under the weight of all these Aurobindos and others. I am told there will be 400 of them in families and singles apart from the 200 who are here, and so unless the divine mercy descends with a greater force than the 'gentle dew' from Heaven, we may be still there receiving people till past three o'clock in the afternoon. So one Aurobindo more or less can make no difference to me. It is you who will rejoice or suffer—according as he falls on you like a ton of bricks or envelopes you like a soothing zephyr in the spring.

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* From Sanskrit, meaning literally: "wolf-belly of dreadful deeds."

"But look at the irony of human decisions and human hopes. My father who wanted all his sons to be great men—and succeeded in a small way with three of them—in a sudden inspiration gave me the name Aurobindo, till then not borne by anyone in India or the wide world, that I might stand out unique among the great by the unique glory of my name. And now look at the swarm of Aurobindos with their mighty deeds in England, Germany and elsewhere! Don't tell me it is my fault because of my indiscretion in becoming famous. When I went to the National College in the Swadehi days which was my first public step towards the ignominies of fame, there was already an Aurobindo Prakash waiting for me there with the sardonic comment of the gods printed on his learned forehead. Aurobindo Prakash, indeed!

"As for the explanation, your epic of the four Aurobindos has suddenly revealed to me why the name Aurobindo has spread and why its bearers are heading for Pondichery. I have it—eureka! And I am released from all *kshobha** at the violated uniqueness of my name. Your description shows that each Aurobindo represents a world-type and it is of the conglomeration and sublimation of great world-types that the supramental-terrestrial will be made. You may not have appreciated their greatness, but that is not their fault. Also the formula for the Supramental may sound to you too chemical like the formula for a patent medicine, but there it is. Incidentally, I am more convinced than ever that you lived and wrote and sighed ('I am between tears and sighs', said Maecenas as he sat between the weak and watery-eyed Virgil and the aesthetic Horace) under Augustus Caesar. You have kept the spirit and turn and most even of the manner.

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* Chagrin.

"Your 'epistolary frivolity' was all right. There is laughter in the Kingdom of Heaven, though there may be no marriage there."

CHAPTER X

THE SEER-POET

I HAVE quoted in Chapter IX a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote to me vindicating the attitude of a seer which might well look like self-superiority to others. But appearances are not always a reliable guide to reality. For instance, many may call over-assertive his answer to a gibe of mine (I had asked whether the Supramental could really be true? Did it not look very much like a juggler whose legerdemain left us eventually high and dry in the land of nowhere?):

"There is no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not Supramental. As for calm and silence, there is no need of the Supramental to get that. One gets it even on the level of the Higher Mind which is the next, above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908 twenty-seven years ago, and I can assure you they were solid and marvellous enough in all conscience without any need of Supramentality to make them more so. Again, 'a calm that looks like action and behaves like motion' is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence, that is what I have had—the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote six volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters, messages et cetera I have written since. If you say that writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it—a jugglery of the consciousness—well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Ashram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which, of course, metaphysically you can) then you land yourself plump into Shankara's Illusionism, and there I will leave you."

Or let us take his statement: "My experience is not limited to a radiant peace. I know very well what ecstasy and *ananda* are from the *Brahmananda* down to the *sharira ananda* (physical bliss) and I can experience them at any time. But of these things I prefer to speak only when my work is done—for it is in a transformed consciousness here and not only above where the *ananda* always exists that I seek their base of permanence."

Or his rejoinder to my charge about his readiness to answer mental questions while denying the mind even a *Lebensraum* in God's good earth:

"But I do not understand how all that can prevent me from answering mental questions. On my own showing, if it is necessary for the Divine purpose it has to be done, Sri Ramakrishna himself answered thousands of questions, I believe. But the answers must be such as he gave and such as I try to answer from a higher spiritual experience, from a deeper source of knowledge and not lucubrations of the logical intellect trying to co-ordinate its ignorance; still less can there be a placing of the Divine Truth before the judgment of the intellect to be condemned or acquitted by that authority—for the authority here has not sufficient jurisdiction or competence."

Now such statements, when torn out of their context and presented baldly, are liable to be misunderstood by the man in the street who, arguing from his lesser platform—or shall I say, abyss of no-vision—may well dismiss the vista that opens on the higher as chimerical or unreal. Some others, who are even more dogmatic in their ignorance, may go a step further and scotch all such claims as pretentious.

But he was nothing if not unpretentious and truthful. In fact it was his meticulous regard for truth that made people misunderstand him so often. He would never pay a conventional compliment or make overstatements to which convivial men are so prone. Not that he was unsocial or aloof by nature: he could laugh and joke and, aye, give as much as he got in badinage. But he was not what is called bluff or expansive. He could love and love deeply, but never to court popularity or expect recognition of his heart's gifts. It was always difficult to label him or measure him with our social yardsticks. For while, on the one hand, he was unaggressive by temperament, on the other, he was too far-seeing a realist to endorse unqualifieldly *ahimsa* or the gospel of non-resistance. He was wont to say that life was too complex to be plumbed with a doctrinaire precept. Ours is an age of fast happenings and the tempo of activity is increasing almost daily. So one must be prepared to change one's focus constantly if one wanted to see life for what it is at any given moment, and still more so if one wished to act on life and initiate changes. He loved to have flings at muddle-headedness and sloppy sentimentality. His scintillating mind gave one the impression of a self-luminous intelligence which he has himself characterised as *pashyanti-buddhi*, when speaking of Krishnaprem's perspicacity, that is, an intellect that *sees*. Whenever I have talked with him face to face, I have had the feeling that his penetrating gaze was entering me through and through and turning me inside out. His analytic power was like a scalpel and yet it was not a cruel scalpel that bit into one's flesh but rather a healing shaft of light that restored tissues beyond redemption—like radium.

All this I felt over and over again and yet such is the immense power of human cussedness which stems from self-love that I misunderstood him everytime I failed to have things my own way. To give an instance in point.

One day it so happened that one of his dignified disciples praised to the skies his "wonderful Yogic gravity" just after I had cracked a joke and laughed aloud with a few other festive friends. As my dignified friend's comment was aimed at me I decided to vent it on the one who had inspired it, as I inferred. So I wrote to Gurudev protesting against my friend's frontal attack on my "vital cheerfulness" as many people called it and added that I doubted whether the dehumanised psychic gravity which he sponsored could ever be as warm and living as the vital *joie de vivre*—and so on. (I may add that many a time did I attack what he called the "psychic" and ended by calling the Supramental suspect—whenever somebody or other nagged at my social light-heartedness.) To that he wrote back: "Something else in you was inclined to see as the only alternative some hard grim ascetic ideal, the blank featureless Brahman and imagined that the Supramental was that; something in the vital looked on the conquest of wrong movements as a hard desperate *tapasaya*, not as a passage into the purity and joy of the Divine—even now something in you seems to insist on regarding the psychic attitude as something extraordinary, difficult, unhuman and impossible! There were these and other lingerings of the mind and the vital; you have to clear them out and look at the simplicity of the Truth with a straight and simple gaze. The Russellian fear of emptiness is the form the active mind gives to Silence. Yet it was on what you call emptiness, on the Silence that my whole Yoga was founded and it was through it that there came afterwards all the inexhaustible riches of a greater Knowledge, Will and Joy, all the experiences of greater mental, psychic and vital realms, all the ranges up to Overmind and beyond. *The cup has often to be emptied before it can be new-filled;* the Yogin, the *sadhaka* ought not to be afraid of emptiness or silence. It is not that there is anything peculiar to you in these difficulties; every *sadhaka* entering the way has to get over similar impediments. It took me four years of inner striving to find a real way, even though the Divine help was with me all the time, and even then it seemed to come by an accident; and it took me ten years more of intense Yoga under a supreme inner guidance to find *the* Way and that was because I had my past and the world's past to assimilate and overpass before I could find and found the future."

But the old Adam in me was not to be appeased so easily in those days—the early thirties. So I wrote back to him:

"O Guru,

You do disconcert country innocents like us even as Krishna did *his* contemporaries with *his vyamishrani vakyani* (contradictory statements). For in one mood you say that the Divine must answer all sincere aspirations and then, in the even next, bewilder us by your enigmatic statement that even the 'Divine help' seemed to come to you by an 'accident'. But at least do have a little commiseration for us humans who long to take you at your word if only you will be so kind as not to make it impossible. Also, Guru, how can we get on with this Divine of yours if even His help on which so much eloquence has been spent down the ages has to be waited for in stupefield passivity since it can only come 'by an accident'?"

Imperturbable as ever, he wrote back:

"I think you have made too much play with my phrase 'an accident', ignoring the important qualification, 'it *seemed* to come by an accident'. After four years of *pranayam* and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a *bhakta* with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended—for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta—and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will—a principle or rather a seed force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or *shastra* to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase 'it seemed to come to me like an accident?' But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like that of humans or in accord with our patterns so that it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for him what he shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we do. If we admit the Divine at all, then the true reason and *bhakti* seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be *avyabhicharini bhakti* (one-pointed adoration)."

With time this spontaneous self-revealing became almost habitual with him, and along with it his friendly argumentativeness with me, so much so that he almost seemed like taking my cussedness seriously as it were. Not that he did not know or that there were any *lacunae* in his understanding of our human nature. He knew very well how oddly it acted especially when it was, as it had to be, lured off the track by its perverse moods. He came down to us merely because he had felt a simple impulse of generosity guided by his profound wisdom. To give a convincing instance, he wrote a long letter which moved me deeply because I had carped at what I called his fundamental incapacity to understand the mentality of the average man as against those who are spiritual giants like himself. That is why, I had whimpered, he always went on talking so glibly about rejecting all doubts or treading the pure sunlit path. As I went on, I gathered further momentum till I broke out into a passionate indictment:

"You write calmly, Guru, that we have only to withdraw from all egoistic movements. I can but smile sadly. For don't you veritably rejoice in assuring us placidly that we can't get rid of the tyranny of pain because we won't —being in love, congenitally, with the drama which the tyrant brings in its wake. Such statements do baffle us, poor humans! For if what you say be true, it would follow (would it not?) that all suffering must be a make-believe, a *maya*, since we like it so much?—ergo, why not welcome it sportingly, taking it all as a joke? That is why I often wonder whether the Supramental consciousness of your ideal stratospheres can ever truly enter into the world of fact of us, mental humans! For I can tell you that we—common mortals, constituted as we are—resist nothing as stubbornly as suffering and agony, self-pity, and despair. For I have noted, times out of number, that my mind experiences only a deep discomfort to see anybody suffer or groan or writhe in agony. How can I then help wondering whether your ascending peak of Yogic consciousness has not made you somewhat aloof, perforce, from what really happens down in our plains of blood and sweat and tears? And then it is not just for the fun of doubt either. For diagnose as you will, I defy you to convince me that I derive any real pleasure in heckling you at every turn—you whose message made me cut away from my dearest moorings and plunge for the unknown! It is only because I find your prescription too outlandish that I have to bandy words with you even when I know, alas, that I cannot possibly cope with your resplendent intellect. But, Guru, what do you come to gain by winning in the lists of wordy arguments? For have you not yourself said again and again that arguments, however weighty, can never do duty for Yogic joy and peace and love—the goods we came for, trusting that you would be able to deliver us if only we followed your lead. But then—and here is the crux of the problem—how can a human, being human, follow such an utterly divine lead as yours so disconcertingly alien to reason and far from feasible, besides? There is a saying in English that you can catch a swallow if you put salt on its tail. You seem to prescribe similarly: 'detach yourself, don't lend your ears to hostile suggestions, open yourself and go on doing it all the time sleeplessly till, one fine morning, you will find your ship simply haled into the harbour of bliss beyond the dark storms!' But how to detach oneself, how to open oneself—how to think only the right thoughts? We ask such questions again and again—only to receive the same answers, everlastingly! Well, Guru, there you have in a nutshell my difficulty, or rather the typical impasse of an average aspirant. But you seem very much like those great doctors who go to a pauper and prescribe remedies for him which only a prince can procure. No wonder we do not recover from our ailments—have little progress to show, alas!"

After despatching the letter I felt even worse—more depressed than ever which, in its turn, made me fear that this time he might be forced, at last, to dismiss me; for hadn't I transgressed the limit and invited dismissal by my virtual refusal to recognise him even as a competent Guide, not to mention a God-realised Guru? But there again he came out once more, unperturbed, with his balm of sympathy which only a truly understanding Guru could offer to one who had failed him utterly and deliberately.

"I never said," he wrote back, "that to overcome doubts was easy, it is difficult because it is the nature of something in the human physical mind to cling to doubt for its own sake. It is not easy to overcome gloom, depression, grief and suffering because something in the human vital clings to it and almost needs it as part of the drama of life. So also I have never said it was not difficult, because they were ingrained in the human vital and even if thrown out were always being brought back into it either by its own habit or by the invasion of the general Nature and the resurgence of its old response. Your idea that my difficulties were different from those of human nature is a mental construction or inference without any real basis. If I were ignorant of human difficulties and therefore intolerant of them how is it that I am so patient with them as you cannot deny that I am? Why for years do I go on patiently arguing with your doubts, spending so much of my time, always trying to throw light on your difficulties, to show how things stand, to give reasons for a knowledge gained by long and indisputable experience? Am I writing these letters to you every night because I have no sympathy with you in your doubts and difficulties? Why do I tolerate and help and write soothing and encouraging letters to these women who break out into hunger-strike and threaten suicide once a fortnight? Why do we bear all this trouble and *tracas* and *fracas* and resistance and obloquy and hard criticism from the *sadhakas*, why were we so patient with men like B and H and others if we had no understanding and no sympathy with the difficulties of human nature? Is it because I press always for faith and discourage doubt as a means of approach to the spiritual realisation? But what spiritual guide with a respect for truth could do otherwise?"

Then with my regard to his diagnoses and prescriptions about pain he went on to argue with me once again for the hundredth time:

"As to the statement about drama and something in you liking to suffer, nobody doubts that your external consciousness dislikes suffering. The physical mind and consciousness of man hates its own suffering and, if left to itself, dislikes also to see others suffer. But if you will try to fathom the significance of your own admission of liking drama or of the turn towards drama—from which very few human beings escape—and if you go deep enough, you will find that there is something in the vital which likes suffering and clings to it for the sake of the drama. It is something below the surface, but it is strong, almost universal in human nature and difficult to eradicate unless one recognises it and gets inwardly away from it. The mind and the physical of man do not like suffering, for if they did it would not be suffering any longer, but this thing in the vital wants it in order to give spice to life. It is the reason why constant depressions can go on returning and returning even though the mind longs to get rid of them, because this in the vital responds and goes on repeating the same movement like a gramophone as soon as it is got going and insists on turning the whole round of the oft-repeated record. It does not really depend on the reasons which the vital gives for starting off to the round, these are often of the most trivial character and wholly insufficient to justify it. It is only by a strong will to detach oneself, not to reject, not to welcome, that one can get rid of this most troublesome and dangerous streak in human nature. When, therefore, we speak of the vital comedy, of the vital drama we are speaking from a psychological knowledge which does not end with the surface of things but looks at these hidden movements—it is impossible to deal with things for the purpose of Yoga if we confine ourselves to the surface consciousness only. It is also according to the rule of these reactions that your despondence should have come immediately after considerable progress in *bhakti* and the will to surrender in the inner being—for it comes from the spirit of darkness which attacks the *sadhaka* whenever it can and that spirit resents fiercely all progress made and hates the very idea of progress and its whole policy is to convince him by his attacks and suggestions that he has made none or that what progress he has made is after all null and inconclusive."

To drive my charge home I had in my letter referred to the failure of his superhuman preecription with a gifted human whom I will call Mr. Philo (abbreviated from Philosopher) who had to be sent away from the Ashram because he refused to give up drink. What about his view, I asked, about God himself being as much bound by his own laws as his creatures by their own karma?

Pat came his answer the next morning.

"As to Philo," he wrote, "the Mother and I have always thought poorly of his thinking mind: he was never able to understand with the mind anything but the orthodox Adwaitic ideas in their most general and popular form. As for his idea of the Divine being bound, being a hostage to law as much as Philo himself or his cat, that was an old pet idea of his . . . an idea that can be accepted only by those who are unable to think philosophically or make the necessary spiritual distinctions. The laws of this world as it is are the laws of the Ignorance and the Divine in the world maintains them so long as there is the Ignorance; if he did not, the universe would crumble to pieces—*utsideyur ime lokah*, as the Gita puts it. There are also, very naturally, conditions for getting out of the Ignorance into the Light. One of them is that the mind of the *sadhaka* should co-operate with the Truth and that his will should co-operate with the Divine Power which, however slow its action may seem to the vital or to the physical mind, is uplifting the nature towards the Light. When that co-operation is complete the progress can be rapid enough; but the *sadhaka* should not grudge the time and the labour needed to make that co-operation fully possible to the blindness and weakness of human nature and effective.

"All this call of yours for faith, sincerity, surrender is only an invitation to make that co-operation more easily possible. If the physical mind ceases to judge all things including those that it does not yet know or are beyond it, like the deeper things of the spirit, then it becomes easier for it to receive the Light and know by illumination and experience the things that it does not yet know. If the mental and vital will place themselves in the Divine Hand without reservation, then it becomes easier for the Power to work and produce tangible effects. If there is resistance, then it is natural that it should take more time and the work should be done from within or, as it might appear, underground, so as to prepare the nature and undermine the resistance. Read the letter of your friend Professor Mohinimohan on Yoga and the spiritual life. Beautifully idealistic, but it does not make allowance for the hard struggle of the spiritual emergence and leaps to fulfilment with too radiant and ethereal a sweep."

"Struggle for spiritual emergence,"—the phrase has, indeed, often recurred to me in my dark hours of stress and tension, but perhaps never with the same revealing force as when I learnt my first deep lesson in spiritual humility. The occasion, the context of my humiliation, will stand out as a landmark in the history of my Yogic evolution in retrospect. I may as well relate it here as the experience did border on the miraculous and I have witnessed very few miracles uptil now.*

It happened in May, 1936. I had been in the Ashram since November, 1928, and now longed to go out for a while to seek a little respite from my exhausting wrestles with my ego. But it hurt my pride to be forced to go out for a temporary relief. I wanted to achieve something durable before seeking diversion. I knew that the only way to achieve anything worthwhile was to surrender one's self-will to the Guru's will. But I wished to dismiss this knowledge as hearsay. "What nonsense!" rebuked my mental vital. "What you need is a strong tonic—a bout of heart-warming, virile *sadhana*: in other words, *doing it*. But this surrender of yours is a myth—synonymous with *undoing it*, and your resignation is a more camouflage, a respectable name for indolence. Remember the Upanishad's exhortation: '*Nayam atma valahinena labhyah*.' (None but the strong wins to the Kingdom of the soul!)"

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* That is, till the end of 1950, for during the next decade I bore witness to almost a procession of miracles; only a few of these I have recorded in my novel, *Miracles Do Still Happen* (Popular Book Depot, Bombay-7).

Not that I was unaware in my heart of hearts that I was merely temporising to put off the inevitable, that in the end I would have to surrender my self-will. But the more I ached to surrender the less I favoured the prospect. Was there no other way—I asked myself in sheer agony till, desperately, I decided on the alternative: the path of *tapasya*. If I persevere, the Divine is bound to respond, so why must I kotow to a will other than my own? I questioned the very basis of *Guruvada* as unmitigated authoritarianism. No wonder my untamed vital jumped to exploit the convenient sophism: "No more bowing," it roared, "to what is imposed from without: the only deity is the Resident within—Him alone worship, '*break all other idols*'." Thus I borrowed the great Vivekananda's *mantra* without stopping to ask myself whether I was cast in his heroic mould! "To tread the austere path, the manly path!"—I goaded my drooping spirits in order to be a master in my own house.

So, I withdrew from all social pleasures and went into a seclusion increasing, day after barren day, my hours of meditation and prayer to the exclusion even of reading and writing. This was the most difficult of all feats, but the more difficult I found it the less I liked to scotch the project; the more I was coaxed by Gurudev to take "the sunlit path of the psychic," the more I repeated to myself a famous *Yoga-vashistha* couplet which said:

> *Rely on thine own strength and, grinding thy teeth,*
> *Defy with heroic deeds the Tyrant, Fate.**

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* "*Param pourusham ashritya dantair dantan vichurnayan Shubhenashubhamudyuktam praktanam poursham jayet.*"

But alas, "Krishna" say the Rishis, "assays you by your attitude, not deeds."* Nor is God mocked. So the more I shut myself in, vowed to plucking the stars from on high by dint of my Herculean *japa* and meditation, the more receded from me all joy of life and zest for *sadhana* till I found myself groping in a veritable catacomb as it were. Life seemed dismal beyond endurance and I did not know where to turn now, having ruled out the Guru's help as hearsay. But it was not even the gloom that mortified me most, but its stark irrelevance in the context of my ardour and aspiration. I could neither understand why my heroic attempt to soar should have been rewarded by clipped wings nor explain how a march towards the east should have pushed me back to the sunset of the last gleam of hope. Alas, now there was nothing for it but to grind my teeth harder still, but the more I persisted the less I succeeded in penetrating the mystery of my dire *pain* which only deepened till—it happened, the great miracle! What it was—let the good reader judge from the correspondence which passed between us.

"O Guru," I wrote after giving him a full history of all that I had gone through, riding my folly, "I wanted to achieve it all by my unaided effort and so, meditated and concentrated as never before, for days and days. But the more I persevered, the deeper grew the gloom and the mental agony till, last evening, when I was utterly shut out from light and felt like one completely stranded, I prayed, in tears, upon my lonely terrace. 'O Krishna,' I said, 'you know I have wanted only you all my life, or at least aspired to want nothing but your Grace. You know also that I decided of late to arrive through *tapasya* because I was told that you never let a sincere prayer go unheeded. And yet how is it that the more I sue you the more you melt away like a shadow form to the eager clutch? I do not understand your *lila*, Lord, but have mercy on one who is at the end of his tether! I own at last that my much-vaunted intelligence cannot find a key to the enigma. I have only learnt one thing: that there is no ignominy in not understanding it all and that the true understanding can come only when one realises that one is completely impotent by oneself. In any event, I appeal to you in this deep impasse to respond to me—give me a sign that you are not a chimera.'

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* "*Bhavagrahi Janardana*"—Janardana is a name of Krishna

"O Guru, as soon as this prayer issued from my heart of humility, I experienced a velvety softness within and a feeling of ineffable plasticity which rapidly grew into something so concrete that I felt almost as if I could *touch* it with my fingers! But even this was not all. As soon as my pride admitted defeat all my piled-up gloom of despair and frustration vanished as though by magic: my restlessness was redeemed by peace and my darkness by a radiance which seemed too incredible to be true and yet too vivid to be dismissed as wishful thinking. And to me it seemed so utterly convincing because it seemed to descend, like an avalanche, from nowhere—to sweep me off my feet when I had least expected it. Kanai congratulates me and insists that I have had a real and important *psychic experience* without knowing it. What have you to say thereto, Guru? To think that even I should have an experience and a psychic one at that!"—and so on.

His reply came, duly, the next morning.

"It was certainly an experience," he wrote, "and as Kanai very accurately described it, an experience of great value: a psychic experience *par excellence*. A feeling of '*velvety softness*' and an '*ineffable plasticity within*,' is a psychic experience and can be nothing else. It means a modification of the substance of the consciousness especially in the vital emotional part, and such a modification prolonged or repeated till it became permanent would mean a great step in what I call the psychic transformation of the being. It is just these modifications in the inner substance that make transformation possible. Further, it was a modification that made a beginning of knowledge possible—for by knowledge in Yoga we mean not thought or ideas about spiritual things but psychic understanding from within and spiritual illumination from above. Therefore the first result was this feeling of yours that '*there was no ignominy in not understanding it all and that the true understanding could come only when one realised that one was completely impotent by oneself.*' This was itself a beginning of a true understanding: a psychic understanding—something felt within which sheds a light or brings up a spiritual truth that mere thinking would not have given, also a truth that is effective, bringing both the enlightenment and solace you needed, for what the psychic being brings with it always is light and happiness, an inner understanding and relief and solace.

"Another very promising aspect of this experience is that it came as an immediate response to an appeal to the Divine. You asked for the understanding and the way out and at once Krishna showed you both: the way out was the change of the consciousness within, the plasticity which makes the knowledge possible and also the understanding of the condition of mind and vital in which the true knowledge or power of knowledge could come. For the inner knowledge comes from within and above (whether from the Divine in the heart or from the Self above) and for it to come the pride of the mind and vital in the surface mental ideas and their insistence on them must go. One must know that one is ignorant before one can begin to know. This shows that I am not wrong in pressing for the psychic opening as the only way out. For as the psychic opens, such responses and much more also become common and the inner change also proceeds by which they are made possible."

Upon this I wrote to him once again asking whether a "feeling" could be called an "experience". Was not a mere feeling something too adventitious and subjective to be able to claim the status of an "experience"? To this again he replied promptly at once.

"I doubt," he wrote, "whether I am able to answer your question or whether even I quite understand it. There is no law that a feeling cannot be an experience. Experiences are of all kinds and take all forms in the consciousness. When the consciousness undergoes, sees or feels anything spiritual or psychic or even occult, that is an experience (in the technical Yogic sense), for there are of course all sorts of experiences which are not of that character. The feelings themselves are of many kinds. The word 'feeling' is often used for an emotion, and there can be psychic or spiritual emotions which are numbered among Yogic experiences, such as a wave of pure *bhakti* or the rising of love towards the Divine. – A feeling also means a perception of something felt—a perception in the vital or psychic or in the essential substance of the consciousness. I find, even often, a mental perception, when it is very vivid, described as a feeling. If you exclude all these feelings and kindred ones and say that they are feelings and not experiences, then you leave very little room for experiences.

"Feeling and vision are the main forms of spiritual experience. One sees and feels the Brahman everywhere; one feels a force enter or go out from one; one feels or sees the descent of Light; one feels the descent of peace or *ananda*. Kick all that on the ground that it is but a feeling, not an experience (what the deuce then *is* an experience?) and you make a clean sweep of most of the things that we call experience. Again, we feel a change in the substance of the consciousness or the state of consciousness. We feel ourselves spreading in wideness and the body only as a small thing in the wideness (this can be seen also). We feel the heart-consciousness being wide instead of narrow, soft instead of hard, illumined instead of obscure, the head consciousness also, the vital, even the physical; we feel thousands of things of all kinds and why are we not to call them experience? Of course it is an inner sight, an inner feeling, not material like the feeling of a cold wind, or a stone but as the inner conciouness deepens it is not less vivid or concrete, it is even more so.

"In this case what you felt was not an emotion—though something emotional came with it—you felt a condition in the very substance of consciousness—a softness a plasticity, even a *velvety softness, an ineffable plasticity*. Any fellow who knows anything about Yoga would immediately say: What a fine experience—a very clear and spiritual and psychic experience!"

But, as Tagore used to say, and rightly, a boon can never be *given*, it has to be *won*, to wit, one has to be mature enough to assimilate it. So, for years to come, the "fine experience" was not repeated—possibly because the prayer of humility did not issue straight from the heart's core with anything like the same intensity. No wonder shadow fell on my path once more after the brief interlude of light, and the old anarchy of darkness and doubt resumed its sway till, sore and weary, I asked him, somewhat foolishly, whether the vicissitudes were imposed on me from without or by the Guru himself to keep his *lila* going. I complained also about his keeping silent when we wanted to be told of the working of occult forces. What on earth did he mean by.

This earth alone is not our teacher and nurse,
*The powers of all the worlds have entrance here.**

He replied tenderly as ever:

"For me the path of Yoga has always been a battle as well as a journey, a thing of ups and downs, of light followed by darkness, followed by greater light, but nobody is better pleased than myself when a disciple can arrive out of all that to the smooth and clear path which the human physical mind quite rightly yearns after."

And then to pacify me further he went on to add:

"If I write about these questions from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with the current opinions, e.g., about miracles, the limits of judgments by sense-data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to data other than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of the laws and forces not recognised by reason or physical science. In my public writings as well as my letters to *sadhakas* I have not dealt with these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some but they do not usually speak about it,* while the public view of much of those that are known is either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience or knowledge. The Yogi arrives at a sort of division in his being in which the inner *Purusha*, fixed and calm, looks at the perturbations of the outer man as one looks at the passions of an unreasonable child; that once fixed, he can proceed afterwards to control the outer man also; but a complete control of the outer man needs a long and arduous *tapasaya*. But even from the *siddha* Yogi you cannot always expect a perfect perfection: there are many who do not even care for perfection of the outer nature which cannot be held as a disproof of their realisation and experience. If you so regard it, you have to rule out of court the greater number of Yogis of the past and the Rishis of the old time also.

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* *Savitri*, Book II, Canto V

"I own that the ideal of my Yoga is different, but I cannot bind by it other spiritual men and their achievements and discipline. My own ideal is transformation of the outer nature, perfection as perfect as it can be. But you cannot say that those who have not achieved it or do not care to achieve it had no spirituality. Beautiful conduct—not politeness which is an outer thing, however valuable—but beauty, founded upon a spiritual realisation of unity and harmony projected into life, is certainly part of the perfect harmony."

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* Cf. Laotse's famous epigram:

The one who knows the Secret does not speak:
The one who speaks does not the Secret know.

* * *

Whenever I felt depressed, or even restive, he wrote to me in this vein—patient and firm, tender and understanding. As days pass, I cannot help but marvel more and more at his incredible capacity for getting under one's skin, as it were, to be able to diagnose everytime the root of the trouble. I shall never forget, to my last day, the deep debt I owe him because of the loving support he gave me unfailingly in a tussle I had with a few of my brother disciples about the interpretation of Yoga and Guruvad. It is too long and tangled a story to be related in full; nor is it necessary, because his letters I am going to quote are sure to prove as informative and revealing as the reader could wish. So I will try to be as brief as I possibly can.

I have been a worshipper of Krishna since my adolescence. The famous saying of the Bhagavat: "*Anye chamshakalah pumsah Krishnastu Bhagavan swayam*: all other avatars are but partial incarnations, while Krishna is the Lord Himself" found a permament niche in my plastic heart when I was barely fifteen years of age. But this does not happen with every aspirant. So quite a few of my brother disciples, who had never heard His mystic Flute-call, looked askance at my fervour for such an old-world "mythical" figure. These must have been a trifle embarrassed to read, after Gurudev's passing, in one of his posthumous sonnets, entitled Krishna (LAST POEMS):

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth
Into this universe terrible and sweet,
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet ....

For this moment lived the ages past,
*The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.**

I say "embarrassed" advisedly; because in those days none of us knew that Gurudev could have possibly "aspired to Krishna's feet" to attain to the last fulfilment. All that we knew was that he had a very high regard for Krishna. Had he not written to me in a letter(dated, 4.1.36) comparing Krishna and Christ: "The two stand in different worlds. There is nothing in Christ of the great and boundless and sovereign spiritual knowledge and power of realisation we find in the Gita, nothing of the emotional force, passion, beauty of the Gopi symbol and all that lies behind it, nothing of the many-sided manifestation of the Krishna figure." In another long letter he wrote to me on 2.12.46 (in answer to a question posed by a very dear friend of mine, Sri Sanjiv Rao, who had asked me "whether the Krishna of Brindaban and the details of His *lila*, divine play, are to be accepted as literally true or merely as beautiful symbols of deep spiritual realities"): "These questions and the speculations to which they give rise have no indispensable connection with spiritual life. There what matters is the contact with Krishna and the growth towards the Krishna-consciousness, the presence the spiritual relation, the union in the soul and, till that is reached, the aspiration, the growth in *bhakti* and whatever illumination one can get on the way. To one who has had these things, lived in the presence, heard the voice, known Krishna as Friend, Lover, Guide, Teacher, Master or, still more, has had his whole consciousness changed by the contact, or felt His presence within him, all such questions have only an outer and superficial interest. So also one who has had contact with the inner Brindaban and the *lila* of the Gopis, made the surrender and undergone the spell of the joy and the beauty or even only turned to the sound of the flute, the rest hardly matters. But from another point of view, if one can accept the historical reality of the incarnation (I have always regarded the incarnation as a fact and accepted the historicity of Krishna as I accept the historycity of Christ), there is this great spiritual gain that one has a *point d'appui* for a more concrete realisation in the conviction that *once at least the Divine has visibly touched the earth, made the complete manifestation possible and made it possible for the divine supernature to descend into this evolving but still very imperfect terrestrial nature.*"

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* Quoted from his posthumous book of poems entitled LAST POEMS, published in 1952. This poem was dated September 15, 1939.

But although those who were students of his great exegesis knew how deeply he had admired Krishna all along, the rank and file talked crudely of his superiority to all other saints, sages and even past avatars. The idea was abroad that he was assuredly superior to Krishna as the latter was but an avatar of the Overmental plane whereas he (Sri Aurobindo) belonged to the still higher, Supramental, plane. This kind of crude and blatant gossip often got on my nerves and made me repeat sturdily the Bhagavat pronuciamento about Krishna being the ultimate Divine, buttressed by Gurudev's endorsement which I have just cited, but it was all to no purpose; my eloquence only made my critics more vocal still till I came to be regarded almost as a black sheep. Some of my brother disciples openly said that to go on worshipping Krishna as the ultimate Divine even after having known Sri Aurobindo amounted to *disloyalty*. As this shocked me to the soul, I declared stoutly in self-defence that it was impossible for me to resile from my stand that I regarded Krishna as the Divine Incarnation and my Guru as His human deputy, and that although I worshipped him in my heart's temple not only as the greatest epic poet of our time, but the wisest Sage (Rishi) of our age. "But there I must draw the line," I added animatedly, "and I do not envy those who want to deify him at the expense of Krishna, the Peerless. My die is cast," I proclaimed sententiously, "and my position is that I can accept my Guru only as Krishna's resplendent representative but not as His double, still less as His superior."

"For all that, Guru," I wrote to him more than once improvising freely as my spirit moved me, "I *have* loved and worshipped you with all my heart and felt thrilled to the soul to accept your lead. If, nevertheless, I fail to get rid of certain reservations in my acceptance of your guidance, please do not take it amiss. For, honest to God, I do not know how on earth I can possibly subscribe to what my soul rebels against, namely, that you are greater than Krishna. But as they say that it is your considered opinion and therefore I must bow to it, I am forced to ask you: if it is really incumbent on a disciple to follow his Guru blindly, mouthing the slogans held by the herd? O Guru, forgive me: but how can I say yes if and when every fibre of my being says no? God being Truth, how can I hope to attain His Grace through pledging myself to falsehood? Lastly, "I wrote in a letter when at last I could bear it no more, "will you grant me an interview when I feel all but lost in this darkness when I am being branded by many as disloyal, cut dead by a few as an infidel, and castigated by a pillar of your Ashram as 'doomed'?"

The Ashram buzzed . . . but lo, to the shocked surprise of the hundred-per-cent "faithfuls" he granted me the interview on Februray 4, 1943. As I have recorded my conversation with him in my *Among the Great* (pp. 331-342) I will quote here only a few lines:

"But you need not be alarmed," he put in placidly. "For Yoga has for its ultimate object the realisation of the Divine and achieving the divine life. These are side-issues and as such need not be looked upon as germane to spiritual experience. So belief in them is not necessary, far less indispensable for realisation. You have the right of private judgments in matters such as these."

My heart-beat abated. "I am relieved," I said. "For I did fear that my inability to accept the Guru's view in every instance might be looked upon by as a sure sign of my unfitness to profit by your guidance."

"You may be reassured once more," he said kindly. "For you can take it from me that when I say or write anything, it's only to state my findings or else explain my point of view: I don't insist on it as a law for others. And can you imagine, knowing me as you do all these years, that I should impose my outlook on others? I have never cared to be a dictator; neither do I insist that everybody's views must be modelled by mine, any more than I insist that everybody must follow me or my Yoga."

(I may quote here a passage, very germane to my theme, from his *Synthesis Of Yoga*: "But the wise Teacher will not seek to impose himself or his opinions on the passive acceptance of the receptive mind; he will throw in only what is productive and sure as a seed which will grow under the divine fostering within. He will seek to awaken much more than to instruct. His work . . . is a trust from above, he himself a channel, a vessel or a representative. He is a man helping his brothers, a child leading children, a light kindling other lights, an awakened soul awakening souls, at highest a Power or Presence of the Divine calling to him other powers of the Divine.")

And the most convincing proof that he had meant every word of it is that, far from being dismissed out of hand, my "recalcitrance" brought me closer to him, alas, to the scandalised surprise of the hundred-percent zealots of our Ashram.

All this, as it often happens in Yoga, stimulated me in a strange way, in the sense that I had feared just the reverse, to wit, I had simply dreaded that Gurudev would grow cold towards me after my all-too-candid confession that I could not dream of ranking him with Krishna as a Messiah or a God-man, playing at hide and seek with us mortals.

And it was because he was truly great that he could go on lavishing on me the largess of his delectable intimacy even after my sturdy refusal to deify him as the others did so jubilantly. I cannot help but regret that ever so many in our Ashram insisted on thrusting on him the crown of Avatarhood even after he had written to Nirod (8.3.35): "Let me make it clear that in all I wrote I was not writing to prove that I am an Avatar! You are busy in your reasonings with the personal question; I am busy more with the general one. I am seeking to manifest something of the Divine that I am conscious of and feel—I care a damn whether that constitutes me an Avatar or something else. That is not a question which concerns me. By manifestation, of course, I mean the bringing out and spreading of that Consciousness so that others also may feel and enter into it and live in it."

But all this is by the way. If A B C . . . X Y Z are fully persuaded that he *was* an Avatar of greater stature than Krishna, that is their affair and I concede they have every right to proclaim their conviction from the housetops. All that I want to convey is that they should not, rationally, condemn me as disloyal if I voice my conviction which is not on all fours with theirs. And my chief reason for recounting all this is not to belittle Sri Aurobindo but to underline the greatness of his incredible tolerance and understanding which made it possible for me to tell him after all this to-do everything that I felt about him and his mission as I envisaged it, asking him at every turn to give me *his* support in every tussle I had with my adverse critics. So I will end this chapter with a few extracts from his letters bearing on the imbroglio. For an imbroglio it was, so much so that my gloom impelled Krishnaprem—to whom I wrote about it—to laugh it away with the sunshine of his radiant laughter:

"But what is this awful news about your giving up laughter? Give up anything else you like: arguing, visitors, reading, writing—but if you give up laughter, I, for one, shall weep. If you don't forswear such a frightful heresy I shall never dare to meet you again. You would come silently into the room, perhaps brushing away a tear from your eye, and say to me in a solemn tone: 'Brother, shall we meditate together a little?' Appalling! And then we should look at each other surreptitiously from downcast eyelids to see whose meditation was deepest! And then: 'Shall we have a little holy talk together, brother?' Ghastly! I don't really believe you can be contemplating anything so dreadful!"

I sent this letter up to Gurudev inviting his opinion: Had sense of humour any place in Yoga ata all? He wrote back the next morning: "Sense of humour? It is the salt of existence. Without it the world would have got utterly out of balance—it is unbalanced enough already—and rushed to blazes long ago."

May this much suffice as a prelude to his letters on Krishna which will, doubtless, be welcome to all Krishna-lovers.

18-6-43

"I thought I had already told you that your turn towards Krishna was not an obstacle. In any case I affirm that positively in answer to your question. If we consider the large and predominant part he played in my *sadhana*, it would be strange if the part he has in yours could be considered objectionable. 'Sectarianism' is a matter of dogma, ritual etc. not of spiritual experience; the concentration on Krishna is a self-offering to the Ishta Deva. *If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to Him you can give yourself to me*. In any case it does not very much matter. We have accepted your loyalty and devotion, your work and service. *All else that is needed can come of itself afterwards*. There is nothing wrong in your self-offering in works and service; it is quite as it should be; you have no reason to feel worried about it. Don't be diffident. More resistance in difficulties and more faith in your spiritual destiny."

16-9-44

"As regards Krishna and devotion, I think I have already answered that more than once. I have no objection at all to the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion, nor is there any incompatibility between the Vaishnava *bhakti* and my Supramental Yoga. There is in fact no special and exclusive form of Supramental Yoga: all ways can lead to the Supermind, just as all ways can lead to the Divine.

"Certainly I will help you and am helping you and will always help you; the idea that I can stop doing it or will send you away (because of my ineradicable thirst for Krishna . . . D.) has no sense in it. If you persevere you cannot fail to get the permanent *bhakti* and the realisation you want but you should learn to put an entire reliance on Krishna to give it when He finds all ready and the time come. If He wants you to clear out imperfections and impurities first, that is after all understandable. I don't see why you should not succeed in doing it, now that your attention is being constantly turned on to it. To see them and acknowledge clearly is the first step.

17-9-44

"Certainly Krishna is credited with much caprice, difficult dealings and a playfulness (*lila!*) which the played-with do not always immediately appreciate. But there is reasoning as well as a hidden method in His caprices and when He does come out of it and takes a fancy to be nice to you, He has a supreme attractiveness, charm and allurement which compensate for all you have suffered. Of course your decision to continue the solitude has our full approval."

2-10-44

"What is there to comment on foolishness? It is a universal human failing. Your remark about Krishna was not so much foolish as desperately illogical. (I wrote to Gurudev that I discovered *de nouveau* that I was foolish plus sensitive.) If Krishna was by nature cold and distant (Lord, what a discovery—Krishna of all people!) how could human devotion and aspiration come near Him—He and it would soon be like the North and South Pole, growing icier and icier, always facing each other but never seeing because of the earth's bulge! Also if Krishna did not want the human *bhakti* as well as the *bhakta* wanting Him, who could get at Him? He would be always sitting on the snows of the Himalayas like Shiva!"

But the climax came when, to cap my discomfiture, a loyal adherent of Gurudev wrote me a letter gently admonishing me on my wrong mood. He advised me—doubtless with the friendliest of motives—to worship Sri Aurobindo and not Krishna. His reason was that if I approached Sri Aurobindo I could get Krishna easily en route for the Supramental, but if I worshipped Krishna, He could only lead me to the Overmental and not the still higher Supramental plateau because Krishna could only attain the Overmental but not the Supramental which only Sri Aurobindo could bring down. The long letter my friend penned wound up with a portentous warning to the effect that though Krishna was "included" in the Supramental, He could not include the Supramental in Himself! Duly I sent that letter up to Gurudev who wrote back to me (1.12.44)!

"I am puzzled and perplexed by this affair of Krishna and the Supermind. A. B. C. D. E. F. etc., of Bombay, Nagpur, and Delhi and P. Q. R. up to X. Y. Z. of Calcutta and Pondichery will all be able to catch hold of its tail and 'include' it in themselves, only poor Krishna can't do it? He can only be Himself 'included' in it? Hard lines on Bhagavan Vasudeva! What I said was that Krishna in *His* incarnation brought down the Overmind into human possibility, because that was His business *at the time* and all that could be done *then;* He did not bring down the Supermind, because that was not possible or at least not intended *at that stage of the human evolution*. I did not mean that He could not have brought down the Supermind if that had been willed at the time. You listen too easily to anybody, G. H. or Q. let us say, and treat their ingenious hairsplitting or unduly authoritative ideas as if they were gospel truths; that causes mental confusion.

I believe Krishna's intentions are to remain with us and He won't run away when the Supermind comes down; so why should Mother and I send you away on His account? It would be a most illogical procedure. So that is that."

But as I dreaded nothing more than disloyalty, I asked Krishnaprem (to whom I was duly sending Gurudev's letters on Krishna) whether it would be disloyal or unwise on my part to want to realise Krishna through the Guru in the traditional Vaishnava way as that *sadhana* made a powerful appeal to my temperament. To that he wrote back:

"I think I said before but anyhow I repeat that when your Guru allows, and more, encourages your *bhava* towards Krishna, there is no need whatever to worry about what others say or feel. All this talk of 'others' about your not being able to get this or that if you go that way is nonsense. There is nothing whatever that cannot be had at Krishna's feet. If your Guru did not support you I might hesitate to say this, as a path that is not sanctioned by one's Guru will never lead to success: however good in itself, it is *paradharma*. But in your case there is no question of that. It is clear from what he wrote to you that he was entirely satisfied with what you are doing. I may have said all this in my letter just after 'Ma' withdrew, but I can't remember what I wrote then and if so, you must excuse the repetition.

"Doubtless there are many ways of getting beyond the mind because that is just where all ways that are ways have to go. I will speak of only two. One is to use the mind to negate the mind and so force the soul to pass beyond. That is the way of Nagarjuna and, though less unmixedly, of Shankara. It is a straight path but rather, like a path ruled out straight on a map, it takes no account of natural obstacles and so is very hard. In any case it is certainly not advisable for you. The other is by love and surrender. The contemplation of Krishna leads straight beyond the mind. I only realised the other day during a talk with a Vedanti friend, a very good *sannyasi* who is here now-a-days, how entirely beyond the mind the contemplation of Krishna is. To his arguments and questions as to how such and such could be true I could only reply that is undoubtedly was so. Everything about Krishna is beyond the mind's grasp and I found that I could not accept any of the rational accommodations and compromises that his mind suggested. They were just inadequate. He too wanted to go beyond the mind but only in his own sober *philosophic* way. But why? There is nothing sober about Krishna. He maddens where He touches and so his worshippers leap where others—at least some others—can only walk, a dignified cap-and-gown sort of walk!

"But really what is all this fuss about? Some people disapprove of you? Well, let them. Even if they are *advanced sadhakas*, why should you care? You have no business with any approval or disapproval but that of Guru and Krishna. 'But,' you may say, 'they are my *gurubhais*'. Let them be, Gurus teach different things to different disciples. Never mind what he may have taught others. You do what he has taught *you*—Yours KRISHNAPREM."

I have quoted his letters without remorse or fear of hell (for betraying confidences) first because these, I felt, would help many a seeker to appreciate better the greatness of Gurudev, and secondly because Krishnaprem's devotion to his Guru could not but prove a flickerless beacon to hundreds who still groped in the dark in this age of barren scepticism. Also, shall I add that he has helped me and many another by not only instilling courage in our hours of despair but also by shedding on our waverings some glow of the steadfast flame he has lit in his heart by dint of his one-pointed *sadhana* and loyalty to his Guru.

CHAPTER XII

*MESSENGER OF THE INCOMMUNICABLE**

THE Gita says that everything that has a beginning must have an end. After Gurudev had assured me that he loved me not a whit less because of my insistence on the unique epiphany of Krishna, things returned slowly to normal and the imbroglio ended.

But woe is me! The respite was as short-lived as it was delectable. For, I had hardly begun to have a glimpse of what Gurudev called the "sunlit path" when a sudden thunder-storm burst and, once more, my horizon grew darker than ever.

And it happened like this:

In 1946, in East Bengal, thousands of Hindus were massacred, their women raped, houses burnt and girls abducted. I felt greatly depressed, the more so as many of my friends kept on writing to me about the urgent need of relief-work for the bereaved Hindus. "Why not let me join the relief-workers, Guru?" I wrote to him after giving him a long account of the fallow land of my heart: "I will have little to lose as I feel I have not been getting on famously in your Yoga for some time past and so am often reminded, now-a-days, of Tagore's remark in 1938: 'You and I are artists, Dilip, not Yogis by temperament'. So will you permit me to go?"—and so on.

To that Gurudev wrote back:

"After receiving your account of your present condition which I understand perfectly well, my advice remains the same: to stick on persistently till the dawn comes—it surely will if you resist the temptation to run away into some outer darkness which it would have much difficulty in reaching. The details you give do not at all convince me that Tagore was right in thinking that your *sadhana* was not at all in line with my Yoga or that you are right in concluding that you are not meant for this line. On the contrary, these are things which come almost inevitably in one degree or another at a certain critical stage through which almost everyone has to pass and which usually lasts for an uncomfortably long time but which need not be at all conclusive or definitive. Usually, if one persists, it is the period of darkest night before the dawn which comes to almost every spiritual aspirant. It is due to a plunge one has to take into sheer physical consciousness unsupported by any true mental light or by any vital joy in life, for these usually withdraw behind the veil, though they are not, as they seem to be, permanently lost. It is a period when doubt, denial, dryness, greyness and all kindred things come up with great force and often reign completely for a time. It is after this stage has been successfully crossed that the true light begins to come, the light which is not of the mind but of the spirit. The spiritual light no doubt comes to a certain extent and to a few to a considerable extent in the earlier stages, though that is not the case with all—for some have to wait till they can clear out the obstructing stuff in the mind, vital and physical consciousness, and until then they get only a touch now and then. But even at the best, this earlier spiritual light is never complete, until the darkness of the physical consciousness has been faced and overcome. It is not by one's own fault that one falls into this state; it can come when one is trying one's best to advance. It does not really indicate any radical disability in the nature but certainly it is a hard ordeal and one has to stick very firmly to pass through it. It is difficult to explain these things because the psychological necessity is difficult for the ordinary human reason to understand or to accept. I will try to have a shot at it, but it may take some days. Meanwhile, as you have asked what is my advice, I send you this brief answer."

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* *I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers . . .*
Messengers of the Incommunicable,
The architects of Immortality! SAVITRI III. IV.

This I sent to Krishnaprem who wrote to me:

"I am so sorry that you are not well and still more so to see the nature of the troubles you refer to. Set your teeth and stick it out as best you can: the darkness will pass if you keep facing it. Never mind what happens: keep your mind on Sri Krishna's feet, remember always that you belong to Him and not to yourself and just go on whether in light or in darkness, in joy or in sorrow as *He* wills. But stick to it. Since your Gurudev sanctions, take a holiday, go to Raman Asram or Ramdas or anywhere else but do not for one moment entertain the thought of ever going back to your old life....

"There can be no going back for us, Dilip: that which we have left behind us has perished and it is a sheer illusion to think that we can recover it. It has gone and whether we like it or not, in sorrow or in joy, we must push on. Don't try to look back even: it only makes us giddy and what we see are only deceitful phantoms.

"Rather we should look to the future with its promise of something quite different from what now is. Now at this moment we should seize the eternal feet of Krishna, not hope to seize them at some future date—'if we are good' as they used to say when we were children. *Now, now, now!* Let the past go and the future take care of itself.

"It is natural that you should be painfully affected by the horrors of Bengal but that too is in Krishna's hands. *He who has given himself to Krishna must keep his eyes on His feet, irrevocably, though the triple world fell into ruin.*"

Upon this Gurudev finally commented:

"Krishnaprem's letter is admirable from start to finish and every sentence hits the truth with great point and force. He has evidently an accurate knowledge both of the psychological and the occult forces that act in Yoga;

all that he says is in agreement with my own experience and I concur. His account of the rationale of your present difficulties is quite correct and no other explanation is needed—except what I was writing in my unfinished letter about the descent of the *sadhana* into the plane of the physical consciousness and that does not disaccord with but only completes what he says. He is quite right in saying that the heaviness of these attacks was due to the fact that you had taken up the *sadhana* in earnest and were approaching, as one might say, the gates of the Kingdom of Light. That always makes these forces rage and they strain every nerve and use or create every opportunity to turn the *sadhaka* back or, if possible, drive him out of the path altogether by their suggestion, their violent influences and their exploitation of all kinds of incidents that always crop up more and more when these conditions prevail, so that he may not reach the gates. I have written to you more than once alluding to these forces, but I did not press the point because I saw that like most people whose minds are rationalised by the modern European education you were not inclined to believe in or at least to attach any importance to this knowledge. People, now-a-days, seek the explanation for everything in their ignorant reason, their surface experience and in outside happenings. They do not see the hidden forces and inner causes which were well-known and visualised in the traditional Indian and Yogic knowledge. Of course, these forces find their *point d'appui* in the *sadhaka* himself, in the ignorant parts of his consciousness and its assent to their suggestions and influences; otherwise they could not act or at least could not act with any success. In your case the chief *points d'appui* have been the extreme sensitiveness of the lower vital ego and now also the physical consciousness with all its fixed or standing opinions, prejudices, prejudgments, habitual reactions, personal preferences, clinging to old ideas and associations, its obstinate doubts and its maintaining these things as a wall of obstruction and opposition to the larger light. This activity of the physical mind is what people call intellect and reason although it is only the turning of a machine in a circle of mental habits and is very different from the true and free reason, the higher *buddhi*, which is capable of enlightenment and still more from the higher spiritual light or that insight and tact of the psychic consciousness which sees at once what is true and right and distinguishes it from what is wrong and false. This insight you had very constantly whenever you were in a good condition and especially whenever *bhakti* became strong in you. When the *sadhaka* comes down into the physical consciousness leaving the mental and higher vital ranges on which he had first turned towards the Divine, these opposite things become very strong and sticky and, as one's more helpful states and experiences draw back behind the veil and one can hardly realise that one ever had them, it becomes difficult to get out of this condition. The only thing then, as Krishnaprem has told you and I also have insisted, is to stick it out. If once one can get and keep the resolution to refuse to accept the suggestions of these forces, however plausible they may seem, then either quickly or gradually this condition can diminish and will be overpassed and cease. To give up Yoga is no solution; you could not successfully do it as both Krishnaprem and I have told you and as your own mind tells you when it is clear. A temporary absence from the Ashram for relief from the struggle is a different matter. I do not think, however, that residence in the Raman Ashram would be eventually helpful except for bringing back some peace of mind; Raman Maharshi is a great Yogi and his realisation very high on its own line; but it does not seem to me that it is a line which you could successfully follow as you certainly can follow the path of *bhakti* if you stick to it, and there might then be the danger of your falling between two stools, losing your own path and not being able to follow the path of another nature.

"As regards Bengal, things are certainly very bad; the condition of the Hindus there is terrible and they may even get worse in spite of the interim *mariage de convenance* at Delhi. But we must not let our reaction to it become excessive or suggest despair. There must be at least 20 million Hindus in Bengal and they are not going to be exterminated—even Hitler with his scientific methods of massacre could not exterminate the Jews who are still showing themselves very much alive and, as for the Hindu culture, it is not such a weak and fluffy thing as to be easily stamped out; it has lasted through something like five millenniums at least and is going to carry on much longer and has accumulated quite enough power to survive. What is happening did not come to me as a surprise. I foresaw it when I was in Bengal and warned people that it was probable and almost inevitable and that they should be prepared for it. At that time no one attached any value to what I said although some afterwards remembered and admitted, when the trouble first began, that I had been right; only C. R. Das had grave apprehensions and he even told me, when he came to Pondichery, that he would not like the British to go out until this dangerous problem had been settled. But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God's victory. *I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world*—I am not speaking of personal things—*which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster*. There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that the black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world; but where is Hitler now and where is his rule? Berlin and Nurenberg have marked the end of that dreadful chapter in human History. *Other blacknesses threaten to overshadow or even engulf mankind, but they too will end as that nightmare has ended.*"

"Guru", I pursued again, "I cry like the gasping Goethe: 'more light'! For I miss it today as never before. I have heard so much about the Divine Grace and seen so little of it so far! But I know you will effectively silence me by saying that in a brighter mood I will contradict myself again for the hundredth time, and you will be right. Nevertheless, do tell me what one is to do when, even after being convinced of the advisability of faith—blind, one-eyed, or fully vigilant—one finds that it is as good as nonexistent in one's composition? Was not faith essentially a seal of Krishna's call, a pledge as it were that one was elected by Him? What has surprised me all along the line is that despite my deficiency in faith I should be almost inexhaustibly rich in *vairagya!* But, alas, *vairagya* unlike *bhakti* or knowledge, is essentially negative and faith I lack, although both you and Krishnaprem have driven me to the wall with unanswerable arguments in its favour. In my present state, however, I often catch myself thinking, ruefully, that the man of faith—like his polar opposite, the sceptic—is born, not made. Otherwise why does my faith play truant so persistently?"

To this Gurudev replied once more with a patience as inexhaustible as my capacity for questioning spiritual truth (and yet accepting, paradoxically, the standpoint of *vairagya*) that without the light of the spirit, life must remain a dismal grasping at phantoms.

"In your case faith is there, not in your mind, not in your vital but in your psychic being. It was this faith that flung you out of the world and brought you to Pondichery; it is this faith that keeps you to what the soul wills and refuses to go back on what it had decided. Even the mind's questionings have been a groping after some justification by which it can get an excuse for believing in spite of its difficulties. The vital's eagerness for realisation and its *vairagya* are shadows of this faith, forms which it has taken in order to keep the vital from giving up in spite of the pressure of despondency and struggle. Even in the mind and vital of the men of the strongest mental and vital faith there are periods when the knowledge in the psychic gets covered up—but it persists behind the veil. In you, in spite of your difficulties there is always the knowledge or intuition in the soul that started you on the way. I have been pressing on you the need of faith because the assent has again to take a positive form (*vairagya* is but the negative form of this assent in you) so as to give free way to the Divine Force; but the persistent drive in the soul (which is hidden behind an exteriorly-suppressed faith) is itself sufficient to warrant the expectation of the Grace to come."

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I have published these letters because although they were written in a personal context they are bound, I am persuaded, to raise echoes in the heart of many a truth-seeker in all climes. It cannot be otherwise inasmuch as he—to put it in Biblical language—"spoke with authority" —the compelling authority of a Seer-poet hymned in the Vedas as the *Kavih*, that is, an authentic Singer who is also the Harbinger of a new Sunrise of the Spirit. That is why he won to the mantric accent which throbs out through his prophetic utterances in ever so many of his poems, and preponderantly in his masterpiece, SAVITRI (Book of Everlasting Day):

A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
On Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground,
The superman shall reign as king of life,
Make earth almost a mate and peer of heaven
And lead towards God and Truth man's ignorant heart
And lift towards Godhead his mortality. . . . . .

Or, to put it in the vibrant language of his *Essays On The Gita*:

"We of the coming age stand at the head of a new age of development which must lead to such a new and larger synthesis. We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools of Tantrics or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the

Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. *We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future.*"

A call such as this does, indeed, appeal to something in one's heart, but more because its ring is authentic than because its tone is hortatory. At the same time, its very authenticity will not allow us to rest on our laurels. Timid conservatism, vowed to playing safe, shies at such an invitation which it confounds with iconoclasm. But Sri Aurobindo could never be an iconoclast: he had too deep a reverence for Truth by which he had been called and chosen. He loved Truth as he loved nothing else in life and counted no cost too great in his sleepless quest for its Light which brooked no barriers. This he had come to realise when he was still a householder and a husband, forty years ago, when he wrote to his wife about his three "madnesses."

".....The second madness that has taken hold of me is that, come what may, I must see God face to face somehow—anyhow....If God exists then there must be some way which takes one to His Presence. It is this path I am set on treading no matter what the odds may be against me."*

But his insatiable spirit trod on many paths or rather any path that opened before him—as he wrote to me in one of his long letters which I quoted in a previous chapter; he had to, because he had never been one to be parochial in his adhesion. His light-avid soul bowed to Truth wherever its sunrise challenged the mists of human ignorance and he loved to recognise all aspirants through whom it manifested in any age or clime, however distant. It could not be otherwise, as he had drunk deep at the fount of Perennial Wisdom, the eternal heritage of Universal Man. Or, to put it in his own words, his soul lived "as eternity's deligate, affiliated to cosmic Space and Time."* "He was," writes one of his eminent biographers, "one of those giant spirits that on occasion tride this world of pigmies, shedding fresh light, giving new life and expanding the frontiers of human vision and consciousness."* And he achieved this because of his oceanic largeness which could receive the waters of all the rivers of the world and the explorer's passion which thirsts to trace each to its origin. It was in this spirit that he had meditated for long years on the mystic lore of the world till he could attest the university of its wisdom in his luminous appraisements. To give but an instance:

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* Translated from one of his three famous letters, written in Bengali, to his wife Mrinalini Devi. These were confiscated along with his other belongings by the C.I.D. Police of Calcutta in 1908 when he was arrested and produced in the Alipore Court as evidence against him.

"There was indeed, almost everywhere an age of the Mysteries," he wrote, "in which men of a deeper knowledge and self-knowledge established their practices, significant rites, symbols, secret lore within or on the border of the more primitive exterior religions. This took different forms in different countries: in Greece there was the Orphic and the Eleusinian Mysteries, in Egypt and Chaldea the priests and their occult and magic, in Persia the Magi, in India the Rishis. The preoccupation of the Mystics was with self-knowledge and a profounder world-knowledge; they found that in man there was a deeper self and inner being behind the surface of the outward physical man, which it was his highest business to discover and know. 'Know thyself' was their great precept, just as in India to know the Self, the Atman, became the great spiritual need, the highest thing for the human being."†

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* Quoted from the Introduction to a biography of Sri Aurobindo entitled, *Mahayogi,* written by Sri R. R. Divakar, Governor of Bihar, Indian Union. (Bhavan Publication).

† Quoted from the Foreword to Sri Aurobindo's translation of a part of Rig Veda, entitled, *Hymns To The Mystic Fire.*

Years ago, when I used to write to Romain Rolland about him and sent him some of his messages of flame he was moved to his depths and felicitated me that I had been fortunate enough to be accepted by such a Guru. And he wrote subsequently: "Aurobindo has realised the most complete synthesis achieved up to the present between the genius of the East and of the West. He is seeking to harmonise the spiritual striving of India and the activities of the West and in pursuance of that aim he is training all the forces of the spirit towards an ascendancy of action."

I cannot, however, claim that I had grasped at the time the full import of statements such as these. For although I was not by nature recalcitrant to Western ideas and influences I could not quite make up my mind in those days whether an ideology foreign to our own could be successfully assimilated by the Indian outlook on life. I read once, for instance, in his Essays on the Gita: "A mass of new material is flowing into us; we have not only to assimilate the influences of the great theistic religions of India and of the world and a recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism, but to take full account of the potent though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking; and, beyond that, the remote and dateless past which seemed to be dead is returning upon us with an effulgence of many luminous secrets long lost to the consciousness of mankind but now breaking out again from behind the veil. All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis; a fresh and widely embracing harmonisation of our gains is both an intellectual and a spiritual necessity of the future."

I did, indeed, read with genuine admiration luminous thoughts such as these. Only I did not at the time clearly see *how* they were going to be translated into a philosophy of action in the field of Karmayoga. Did not the Gita itself, I argued, enjoin us to beware of the vitiating influences of worldly preoccupations and human motives? And might we not, I wondered, forfeit much that is of the highest value in our uncompromising spiritual outlook if we allowed it to be modified if not warped by the secular outlook of what Sri Aurobindo called "modern knowledge and seeking"? "Synthesis" was all right but could there be an amalgam of oil with water?

I knew of course that do what we would we could not hope to shut the world out and yet keep on growing. For when all is said and done, the world being one, nothing on earth could sunder and guard the East and the West eternally in watertight compartments. But the paradox is that we want to grow and yet dread to change. So what I admitted in theory I came to repudiate in practice when the acceptance demanded a modification of the *status quo* to which I had been bred. That is why so many of us chafed at what we called "the tyranny of the imposed discipline." We wanted to be masters in our own houses. But this often becomes impossible in a Yoga-ashram where one had to subordinate one's will to that of the Guru. So what else could we do but call the outer discipline suspect, contending that it was hardly distinguishable from authoritarianism if not despotism? Why, indeed, must an occidental interior-decorator, an interloper, be invited into the cosy parlour of our self-will and *laissez-faire?* Discipline was boosted in the West but look at what is happening there: men and women are getting more and more unhappy and cramped, slaving day and night like lifeless robots in a soulless manufactory deified as the State. India cherished individuality as sacrosanct and our spiritual men set store by the guidance of the inner beacon within as against the red lights of the outer policemen. Did not the Gita counsel following one's native *dharma*? Discipline of the outer kind may be play to the Westerners but beware! it may well prove death to us Indians! . . . And so on.

To that he replied, in 1948: "Discipline in itself is not something Western; in oriental countries like Japan, China and India it was at one time all-regulating and supported by severe sanctions in a way that Westerners could not tolerate. Socially, whatever objections we may make to it, it is a fact that it preserved Hindu religion and Hindu society through the ages and through all vicissitudes. In the political field there was on the contrary indiscipline, individualism and strife; that is one reason why India collapsed and entered into servitude. Organisation and order were attempted but failed to endure. Even in the spiritual life India had not only the free wandering ascetic, a law to himself, but has felt impelled to create orders to *sannyasins* with their rules and governing bodies and there have also been monastic institutions with a strict discipline."

No one who truly loves India could possibly demur at this, least of all a spiritual seeker because, clarity of vision being incumbent on him, he must see clearly how insidiously indiscipline betrays the aspirant into the slough of *tamas* of the worst kind—a fact which made the great Vivekananda inveigh so often against our vital lethargy and mental somnolence masquerading as *sattwic* spirituality. "These *tamasic* people," he wrote scathingly in a letter, "will pass their lives in wrong actions or sloth and then run helplessly to us, Yogis, in the expectation that we shall redeem their misery with miracles of Yoga. They will persevere in nothing . . . nor undertake any serious *sadhana*. My campaign is against such miracle-mongering psuedo-spirituality."

Sri Aurobindo had all along concurred with Vivekananda in denouncing lethargy and sloth stalking the land masquerading as spirituality and *sattwic vairagya*. In point of fact, it was because he saw the blasting effect of *tamas* on the aspiration of the spiritual seeker that he, like the great Vedantin, condemned inertia unqualifiedly and held *karma*—works—undertaken in the spirit of the Gita as of the essence of Integral Yoga.

But he had accepted works primarily because without works not only must our nature remain unredeemed, but no real acceptance of life could follow. Also, since life must, in the end, include the body as well as the mind, so he unhesitatingly lifted the time-old ascetic ban on the body which he did not equate with a pitiful mass of flesh and bone but rather as a divine gift which could, in the last analysis, he wrote, "become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss—casting the beauty of the light of the spirit, suffusing and radiating from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the spirit, its joy of the seeing mind, its joy and life of spiritual happiness, the joy of Matter released into spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy." That was his view of the human body in a full and rich life guided by the spirit and surrendered to the Divine who answers when, it is so consecrated, by transforming the seemingly dread dungeon of the sorrowing soul into a veritable temple of delight. Had it been otherwise he would not have written in the same message (on the perfection of the body): "If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside: for the body is the material basis . . . *Shariram khalu dharmasadhanam* . . . the means of fulfilment of *dharma* means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out and its actions."

But altogether there was nothing in all this that my mind could object to since his contention was not essentially incompatible with our Indian ideal of spirituality, yet my heart misgave me again and again whenever somebody in the Ashram lamented that we were drifting away from our hoary Indian moorings and falling under the spell of the Western cult of idolising physical pleasures or life's instincts, as against the treasures of the spirit.

I was in the grip of just such a mood when I wrote to him once, in 1948: "Tell me, Guru, what exactly are you expecting us to achieve at this stage of our (or your) *sadhana*? Could it possibly be that you have had a new revelation again which has decided you to scotch India's advocacy of *vairagya* and other-worldliness and have it replaced *in toto* by the Western outlook on life, which refuses to look beyond our present horizon? It is not I alone who am at sea here, but Duraiswami also—a man we all revere and love—who confesses that in spite of his great reverence for your wisdom he has been finding it a little difficult of late to understand your growing stress on this-worldliness and diminishing approval of other-worldliness. I have, hitherto, given you my loyal adhesion (such as it is) in the belief that you, the modern Messiah, are going to deliver the goods, justifying the ways of earth to heaven. You have sung of a harmonisation of seemingly incompatible elements of life so that human culture may achieve, at long last, its final "unity in diversity". But in this new synthesis, to be achieved by you, what, exactly, is going to be the contribution of India? I ask this with deep misgivings today as it seems to me that the Indian traditions are somewhat unlikely to have any *Lebensraum* in the new Supremental Millennium *you* are going to inaugurate."

And duly, after my irreverent fling, I let my despondence get the better of me for the joy of venting my sorrow. "And since I cannot help doubting and brooding like this," I added, "tell me frankly, once and for all, whether, believing as I do in the spiritual traditions of India whose soul I adore, I can still serve you as a loyal disciple when your ideal seems to me to be receding rather fast from the Indian?"

After despatching the letter in haste I rued my impulsiveness in leisure, the more so because I feared that my downright attitude would now leave him no alternative but to call me a "misfit" in his Ashram which stood for ideals other than the ones we had grown to cherish since our childhood. In a word, I felt like a suicide who, after digging his own grave, stands aghast at the prospect of having to descend into it alive. So, my exuberant joy may be imagined when, next morning, I received his letter dripping tenderness and solicitude. Patiently and laboriously as ever, he answered me once again, point by point.

"One thing I feel I must say," he wrote "in connection with your remark about the soul of India and Duraswami's observation about my stress on this-worldliness to the exclusion of other-worldliness. I do not quite understand in what connection his remark was made or what he meant by this-worldliness, but I feel it necessary to state my own position in the matter. My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time, I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose other-worldliness only, and if he finds peace by this choice he is greatly blessed. I, personally, have not found it necessary to do this in order to have peace. In my Yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my view—the spiritual and the material—and to try to establish the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Power in men's hearts and earthly life, not for a personal salvation only but for a Divine life here. This seems to me as spiritual an aim as any, and the fact of this life taking up earthly pursuits and earthly things into its scope cannot, I believe, tarnish its spirituality or alter its Indian character. This at least has always been my view and experience of the reality and the nature of the world and things and the Divine: it seemed to me as nearly as possible the integral truth about them and I have therefore spoken of the pursuit of it as the Integral Yoga. Everyone is, of course, free to reject and disbelieve in this kind of intregality or to believe in the spiritual necessity of an entire other-worldliness altogether but that would make the exercise of my Yoga impossible.

"My Yoga can include indeed a full experience of the other worlds, the plane of the Supreme Spirit and the other planes in between and their possible effects upon our life and material world; but it will be quite possible to insist only on the realisation of the Supreme Being or Ishwara even in one aspect, Shiva, Krishna as Lord of the world and Master of ourselves and our works or else the Universal Sachchidananda and attain to the essential result of this Yoga and afterwards to proceed from them to the integral results if one accepted the ideal of the divine life and the material world conquered by the Spirit. It is this view and experience of things and of the truth of existence that enabled me to write The Life Divine and Savitri. The realisation of the Supreme, the Ishwara, is certainly the essential thing; but to approach Him with love and devotion and *bhakti*, to serve Him with one's works and to know Him, not necessarily by the intellectual cognition, but in a spritual experience is also essential in the path of Integral Yoga. If you accept Krishnaprem's insistence that this and no other must be *your* path, that it is this *you* have to attain and realise, then any exclusive other-worldliness cannot be *your* way. I believe that you are quite capable of attaining this and realising the Divine and I have never been able to share your constantly recurring doubts about your incapacity and their persistent recurrence as a valid ground for believing that they can never be overcome. Such a persistent recurrence has been a feature in the *sadhana* of many who have finally emerged and reached the goal; even the *sadhana* of very great Yogis has not been exempt from such violent and constant recurrences, they have sometimes been the special objects of such persistent assaults, as I have, indeed, indicated in Savitri in more places than one, and that was indeed founded on my own experience. In the nature of these recurrences there is usually a constant return of the same adverse experiences, the same adverse resistance, thoughts destructive of all belief and faith and confidence in the future of the *sadhana*, frustrating doubts of what one has known as the truth, urgings to the abandonment of the Yoga or to other disastrous counsels of *decheance*. The course taken by the attacks is not indeed the same for all but still they have a strong family resemblance. One can eventually overcome if one begins to realise the nature and source of these assaults and acquire the faculty of observing them (without being involved or absorbed into their gulf), finally becoming the witness of the phenomena and understanding them and refusing the mind's sanction even when the vital is still tossed in the whirl or the most outward physical mind still reflects the adverse suggestions. In the end these attacks lose their power and fall away from the nature; the reccurrence becomes feeble or has no power to last; even, if the detachment is strong enough, they can be cut out very soon or at once. The strongest attitude to take is to regard these things as what they really are: incursions of dark forces from outside taking advantage of certain openings in the physical mind or vital part, but not a real part of oneself or spontaneous creation in one's own nature. To create a confusion and darkness in the physical mind and to throw into it or awaken in it mistaken ideas, dark thoughts, false impressions is a favourite method of these assailants, and if they can get the support of the mind from over-confidence in its own correctness or the natural rightness of its impressions and inferences, then they can have a field day until the true mind reasserts itself and blows the clouds away. Another device of theirs is to awake some hurt or rankling sense of grievance in the lower parts and keep them hurt or rankling as long as possible. In that case one has to discover these openings in one's nature and learn to close them permanently to such attacks or to throw out intruders at once or as soon as possible. The recurrence is no proof of a fundamental incapacity; if one takes the right inner attitude it can and will be overcome. One must have faith in the Master of our life and works, even if for a long time He conceals Himself, and then in His own right time He will reveal His Presence."

In my unutterable relief I took his tolerance and forgiveness for granted once again and wrote back: "How I wish, Guru, you could persuade this 'Master of our life and works' to reveal to us mortals a little more of His Grace working a few miracles? I have read and heard so much of the Lord of miracles in repose, but when shall I see Him in action for a change?" . . . And so I went on and on, little dreaming how promptly my prayer was going to be granted and in what inconceivable a context! It is not easy to describe the miracle I saw but I will do my best hoping that a few at least will understand.

It so happened that a few months after this, an avowed disciple of mine, Janak Kumari Malhotra (alias Indira), fell seriously ill. Were I free to write about her in detail, I could make her story more gripping than a first class fiction, but as she is utterly opposed to my making public her spiritual experiences (including her *samadhi*, clairvoyance, clairaudience etc.), I must confine myself to relating here how Sri Aurobindo began to take interest in her, first, for my sake and then for her own, so much so that he was partly instrumental in saving her life at the eleventh hour. (I must, however, warn the reader at the very outset that it is no part of my purpose to try to prove this, nor do I need to, since he assured me more than once that he had directed his Yogic power to save her life, and the miracle happened in that he succeeded when it was a case of "touch and go", as her doctors had said.) But here I must pause to introduce her briefly.

She had come to our Ashram for the first time in February, 1949 and stayed with me. She had wanted spiritual help. I suggested she accept Sri Aurobindo. She answered, to my astonishment, that she could accept no Guru but myself. I pleaded my inability and tried to make her see the greatness of Sri Aurobindo. She smiled and said that nobody who had eyes could ever dispute the light of the sun but, at the same time, she added, a Guru was not taken but given. In my extremity, I referred the matter to Sri Aurobindo. He replied at once that she had been right and I was not to persuade her to accept any Guru other than myself because, he wrote: "She feels that it is you who have brought her to us and helped her and guided her; us she looks upon as *your* Gurus." I should perhaps have still refused to comply had I not been as impressed as I was by her sincerity, truthfulness, intelligence, poetical gift, capacity for spiritual experience and, above all, her incredible purity of character. She was noble and generous to a fault, utterly indifferent to wealth, though born to wealth, and social without being attached to society. But, as it often happens with such highly evolved natures, she was exceedingly reticent and sensitive, besides. As a result, she had suffered much and long which had all but ruined her health. Still she had put up a brave front and never told anybody till, finally, she broke down—in November, 1949—in Jubbulpore where she lived with her husband. At first he had not taken her illness seriously but when her condition deteriorated alarmingly, an appeal was sent to Sri Aurobindo and I received a telegram to the effect that the doctors had all resigned and that her life was despaired of. At this time I made a most serious blunder against the express advice of Sri Aurobindo and wrote to her insisting that she take him also for her Guru as, obviously, I had no power to save her and he had. This proved to be the last straw as she decided, mistakenly, that I had disowned her as a disciple and she did not want to be saved by anybody other than her Guru and that she could not look upon Sri Aurobindo as *her* Guru. "Something has snapped within me," she wrote to me. "All the warmth is gone; I can't feel anything; my heart is frozen and can no longer respond to anything." Deeply alarmed, I wrote to Gurudev confessing my blunder, the more unpardonable as I had, impulsively, perpetrated just what he had warned me against, so categorically. The soul of compassion and understanding, he wrote back instantly, advising me to proceed at once to Jubbulpore promising to do his best to save her. "I hope," he wrote, "that it is a passing depression created by her misunderstanding of what you wrote to her and that the elasticity of her psychic temperament and aspiration will help her to recover from it rapidly, if not at once. Still, wires and letters may not help her to recover her natural condition immediately and your presence there may be necessary and certainly advisable, since it will set things right at once. So you can start tonight as you propose.

With love and blessings, Sri Aurobindo (21.12.49).

So I started the same afternoon by motor and was by her bedside the next evening, hoping against hope that Gurudev's Yogic force would work the miracle. But when I saw her my heart misgave me, for although I knew for certain (from all that Sri Aurobindo had written about her to me and her) that she had been both called and chosen, I did not see how her terrible convulsions were going to be remedied. So I took my courage in both hands and risked enjoining her to dismiss all the doctors who were attending on her. She readily agreed and told them that she would leave it all to the Lord who (and not the doctors) must prescribe for her henceforward. Her people were aghast, but when I wrote to Gurudev about her resolution (I was writing to him daily about her symptoms and experiences) he wrote to me endorsing my advice and belauding her faith warmly. (Apropos, a few day before I started for Jubbulpore he had written to me—on December, 1949, to be more precise—explaining much about what had been happening to her "because of her advanced spiritual consciousness" and had added that her *samadhi* was of the "*savikalpa* kind.")

Lastly, in a letter which I received in Jubbulpore he wrote: "Of course I will try to the end; for my experience is that even a hopeless effort in the fields of the working of the spiritual force is often better than none and can bring in the intervention of the miracle."

I shook my head ruefully and wrote back: "But alas, Guru, I have never had a congenital weakness for what we, Indians, so wistfully call 'faith in miracles.' So if you will pardon me, I can only hope, against hope, that its agency may come to our rescue before it is too late." Then after giving him a long account of her ailments I added: "From the doctors here I have gathered—what has fairly staggered me—that Indira has been suffering from chronic asthma, coronary thrombosis, dilatation of the heart, osteo-arthritis, low blood-pressure, utter lack of appetite, anaemia and God knows what else, still undiagnosed. So I am afraid you will have to invoke a *major miracle* if you really mean business."

But the major miracle did happen: at the eleventh hour, when all seemed lost and people had started crying, she recovered after having obstinately continued to refuse all medicines for well over three months.

This made a difference even to my sceptic mind in that I won here a *point d'appui* for my faith in Yogic powers achieving results which I can only describe as too incredible to be discredited. But I prefer to close this episode with a relevant letter which Gurudev wrote to me in reply to some questions which I had to discuss with Indira during her illness about the application of spiritual force to preserve health or cure physical ailments. I had asked him in my letter, among other things, how far he undersigned Sri Ramkrishna's condemnation of the utilisation of spiritual force to keep the body in health.

"I might say a word about Sri Ramkrishna's attitude with regard to the body," he wrote. "He seems to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilise it for taking care of the body or curing its ailments. Other Yogis—I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop Yogic *siddhis*—have not had this complete disregard of the body: they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga. I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others. . . . I put a value on the body first as an instrument, *dharmasadhana*, or, more fully, as a centre of manifested personality in action, a basis of spiritual life and activity as of all life and activity upon earth, but also because, for me, the body as well as the mind and life is a part of the Divine Whole, a form of the Spirit and therefore not to be disregarded or despised as something incurable, gross and incapable of spiritual realisation or of spiritual use. Matter itself is secretly a form of the Spirit, and has to reveal itself as that, can be made to wake to consciousness and evolve and realise the Spirit, the Divine within it. In my view the body as well as the mind and life has to be spiritualised or, one may say, divinised so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realisation of the Divine. It has its part in the Divine *lila*, even according to the Vaishanava *sadhana* in the joy and beauty of Divine Love. That does not mean that the body has to be valued for its own separate sake or that the creation of a divine body in a future evolution of the whole being has to be contemplated as an end and not as a means—that would be a serious error, which would not be admissable."

I have a special purpose in quoting this letter. Paradoxical though it may sound, I have all along had a marked streak of the other-worldly *vairagya* in my composition which was not a little responsible for my protracted struggles in the Ashram. Yet when I saw my own disciple in the throes of death I could not help but pray for her recovery, as much to save her life as to get rid of my own pain. And it was only when she recovered that I realised anew, as it were, that no Yoga could be held to be truly satisfying to sensitive, refined souls if it despised Matter as incompatible with the spirit or belittled the place of the body in spiritual life. For although Sri Aurobindo admitted that "the body is the creation of the Inconscient," he declined to accept it at its face value because "what we call Inconscient" he held, "is an appearance, a dwelling place, an instrument of a secret Consciousness or a Superconscient which has created the miracle we call the universe. Matter is the field and the creation of the Inconscient and the perfection of the operation of inconscient Matter, their perfect adaptation of means to an end, the wonders they perform and the marvels of beauty they create, testify, in spite of all the ignorant denial we can oppose, to the presence and power of consciousness of this Superconscience in every part and movement of the material universe. It is there in the body, has made the body, and its emergence in our consciousness is the secret aim of evolution and the key to the mystery of our existence."*

Today his messages such as these seem to win to a new vibrancy of a far deeper significance. Why—since Indira had not even accepted him as her Guru—did he write to me when I felt like giving up: "So long as there is the slightest shadow of a hope we must fight to the end to save her"? And why did he enjoin me at this time to act as her Guru when I had decided that I had no right to accept anybody as my protege at that crucial stage of my *sadhana?*

Not that my self-love had not been substantially tickled at being authorised to take in hand so evolved a soul; but then I felt even more dismayed at the prospect of guiding a disciple when I saw myself stumbling so often on the way. Could such a one venture to lead another and yet keep faith with his conscience? And lastly—to cap my discomfiture, as it were—Indira testified again and again that she had received my help, even though I was not conscious of having given any!

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* *Perfection of the Body,* an article by Sri Aurobindo published in *Bulletin of Physical Education,* April, 1949.

Duly I wrote to him about it all soliciting his explanation and opinion.

And he replied at once and categorically.

"You can help and have helped others," he wrote, "and drawn them to the spiritual path and you have made many turn towards us who of their own motion would not have thought of doing so. There is a power in you to draw others like that and it seems that not only nature but the Divine has put it in you for this service and that is quite right that you should use it for Him as you have done. There can be no harm in using His gifts for Him when it is done in the right spirit."

I was deeply moved, once again, by his unfailing understanding and compassion which prompted him to lavish so much tenderness on a refractory disciple who, thanks to his recalcitrance, found it so difficult to accept his lead and profit by his constant encouragement. I recall how I had been so depreseed once as to doubt his love (even after he had called me "a friend and a son") and wrote regretting his "aloofness from us all, possibly wanting to shine almost like a mythical figure in a crystal tower inaccessible to mortals stifled by dusty life?" I had expected a rebuke this time but he, being what he was, answered with one of the sweetest letters I have ever received. He wrote:

"It is a strong and lasting personal relation that I have felt with you ever since we met and *even before* and it is only that that has been the base of all the outward support, consideration, care and constant helping endeavour which I have always extended towards you and which could not have arisen from any tepid impersonal feeling. On my side that relation is not likely to change ever."

And he went to add, explaining: "Even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had that relation which declares itself constantly through many lives and followed your career (all that I could hear about it) with a close sympathy and interest. It is a feeling which is never mistaken and gives the impression of one not only *close to one but a part of one's existence*. . . . The relation that is so indicated always turns out to be that of those who have been together in the past and were predestined to join again (though the past circumstances may not be known) drawn together by old ties: It was the same inward recognition (apart even from the deepest spiritual connection) that brought you here. If the outer consciousness does not fully realise this, it is because of the crust always created by a new physical birth that prevents it. But the soul knows all the while." (August 2, 1935).

In another letter he wrote with the same simple humility to remove a misunderstanding for which my self-love alone was responsible:

"I was taken aback by your letter, for my remarks about X had been perfectly casual . . . I would certainly not have written them if I had had thought they were of a kind to cause trouble to you. In scribbling them I had no idea of imposing my views about X on you—I had no idea of writing as a Guru to a disciple or laying down the law, it was rather as a friend to a friend expressing my views and discussing them with a perfect ease and confidence . . . because we feel close to your psychic being always and that is the relation which we have quite naturally with you. . . . I do not believe in human judgments because I have always found them fallible—also perhaps because I have myself been so blackened by human judgments that I do not care to be guided by them with regard to others. All this, however, I write to explain my own point of view: I am not insisting on it as a law for others. I have never been in the habit of insisting that everybody must think as

I do—any more than I insist on everybody following me and my Yoga." (December, 1934)

But even such letters, while they consoled and chastened me, only deepened my gloom. That he, a being of light and vision and tolerance, should go on writing so humbly to one so flawed and obstinate and presumptuous as myself! Why should he have loved me as he did when I was weighed so often and found worth dismissing? What, indeed, had I brought him except loads of worry and trouble —and not only on my own account but also on that of so many I cared for? It was well-known in the Ashram that he would take no end of pains to help any one "recommended by Dilip." I remember, in particular, how much of his time he had spent to save a beloved pupil of mine, Srimati Uma Bose (given the title of "the Nightingale of Bengal" by Mahatma Gandhi) who died at twenty-one and, when I felt bereaved, how tenderly he consoled me! I asked him (8.2.53):

"But why did such a lovely flower have to fade away prematurely before blossoming—casting a gloom on all who had known and cherished her for her exquisite singing and snow-pure character? And then look at the lengthening shadows all over the world, brothers killing brothers! I do believe in Grace, Guru, but it acts, I take it, only under certain conditions which are, to put it mildly, unlikely to be fulfilled by recipients such as we. So why waste your precious time and energy on such a world where the Divine guidance looks almost out of place?" And so on.

He was not writing at all in those days. In fact, since the beginning of world War II (1939) he had been engrossed in directing all his Yogic powers against the hounds of hell which the rise of Hitler had unleashed.*

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* On September 3, 1943 he wrote to me a long letter which I might as well quote here in part because it is relevant. After explaining what the spiritual issue was and why the World War II should not be looked upon "as a fight between nations and

Nevertheless as soon as he saw how urgently I needed the balm of his spiritual solace he answered—in February, 1942—and an answer of light it was to my groping soul.

"The question you have put," he wrote, "raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it adequately would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of my *Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge, founded not on reasoning but on experience, that there *is* such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

"If we look only at the outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most we see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guid-

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governments—still less between good people and bad people—but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric (Diabolic)," he went on to add: "What we have to see is—on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and action which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side (the Axis) would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least have stood for human values, though they may often act against their best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the virtues of the Herrenvolk, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a primary importance."

ance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to undestand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge—even scientific knowledge—comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as this 'unhappy and transient world"—*anityam asukham lokam*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanical inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then—inevitably—there must be a guidance—and that means that there *is* a supporting Consciousness and Will with which we can come into an inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual and eventual failure.

"This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience; error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently, too, a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty—at least a partial flowering of these things.* The meaning of this world must lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and must be leading the individual certainly, and the world presumably, towards the higher state but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms, still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. *Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a higher Light, Truth and Bliss;* the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

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* Cf. Savitri, Book VI, Canto I:

Through Nature's contraries we draw near to God;
Out of the darkness we still grow to light.
Death is our road to immortality.

"The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can only get an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge or vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and observe how they all tended without our knowing it towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made—not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course; they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny.

When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come which helps or directly guides or moves us: it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them—except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

"It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world movement. That seems to move according to conditions and laws or forces of the movement through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens at a particular juncture or the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophical, is not ultimately determinative. Here, too, one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth, and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but outbursts of the Light. In the maze of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearance of this or that epoch or movement, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the decisive victory—even temporary—of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be; for the world-movement often works in that way. I leave it at that and say nothing more.

"Uma Bose had reached a stage of her development marked by a predominance of the *sattwic* nature, but not a strong vital (which works towards a successful or fortunate life) or the opening to a higher light—her mental upbringing and surroundings stood against that and she herself was not ready. The early death and much suffering may have been the result of past (prenatal) influences or they may have been chosen by her psychic being as a passage towards a higher state for which she was not yet prepared but towards which she was moving. This and the non-fulfilment of her capacities could be a final tragedy if there were this life alone. As it is, she has passed towards the psychic sleep to prepare for her life to come."

Yes, he was always like that: so ready to comply whenever I invited him to help—no matter who it was. And it was with the same kind interest that he dealt with a genius or a multi-millionaire as with a wastrel or an orphan. Also, he did it so spontaneously—almost as if it were the least he could do—that it was, indeed, sometimes difficult to be grateful to him or even to recognise it for compassion. How often have I wondered whether this might not have been due to *his* way of giving: he made as though he simply *had* to come to people's help without criticizing them at all. I wrote to him once that his way of "reforming by love as against reprimand" did remind one of Vivekananda's famous dictum: "Every step that has been really gained in the world has been gained by love; criticizing can never do any good; it has been tried for thousands of years. Condemnation accomplishes nothing."*

And yet what was this love which he or Vivekananda had so vividly realised? Can we ever really know from *our* experience of love on the human level? What was the love which had made him stake everything dear to mortals for something we do not even understand—the Supermind, whose "advent" he saw and proclaimed as "inevitable"? Some of his critics blindly charged him with an inordinate ambition. Once I conveyed to him that these poohpoohed him because he was lusting for greatness and wanting to achieve something (the Supermind) which even Krishna did not succeed in establishing on earth. To that he wrote:

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* Inspired Talks p. 75.

"It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense. I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth consciousness. I see it above and know what it is—I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth-evolution. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense and Truth-vision. If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. *It is a question between the Divine and myself—whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption—I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others.*"

Unfortunately, human nature has a penchant for sectarianism which seems to be all but ineradicable. That is why even so soul-stirring and unexceptionable a letter was misinterpreted by some who accused him of belittling Krishna's greatness. But though by nature unpretentious and pacifist,* he would, if his vision demanded it, ruthlessly sweep aside everything and cut away from his moorings of tradition and custom to answer the call of his soul of flame. But alas, we, who have learnt to idolise reason, have grown a little too prone to regarding faith somewhat a la Don Quixote who may, on occasions, be lovable and entertaining, but is, by and large, too simple to be taken seriously. When, however, we choose thus to let reason deride faith we forget that two can play at that game, Faith being able to retort that Reason, too, may sometimes behave as a knight of famous folly when it

Sits on a high horse-back of argument
To tilt for ever with a wordy lance
In a mock tournament where none can win.

(Savitri II. X).

But although *his* faith appealed to us, moderns, because it originally emerged like fecund fire out of an impact between his heart's vision and mind's doubt, I must still confess that I myself never found it easy to keep faith with faith, as will, doubtless, be amply borne home to my readers. But after his passing I began dimly to see something which I can only ask those to accept who knew him for what he was. It is nothing, I repeat, but a homecoming to simple faith. For it began to dawn on me now, after I had turned the full circle, that man must, at the culmination of his vision, revert to the simple child who lives by and grows in faith alone. To put it differently, we who have, by now, become all but distracted by the wordy inconclusiveness of reason must hark back again to faith—not, indeed, in rumour and hearsay but in what no babel of words can muffle: the mystic Flute-call heard by the highest spirits of every age. To us, who have heard *his* clarion, there can be no question of following a lesser call: we must consecrate all we have and are to achieve what he left unaccomplished (Savitri XI. I):

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* He wrote to me in a letter somewhat light-heartedly (26.10.34): "But all that is probably because I am consitutionally lazy (in spite of my feats of correspondence) and so prefer the easiest and the most automatic method possible.

> *"To raise the world to God in deathless Light . . .*
> *To change the earthly life to life divine,"*
> fortified by our faith that
> *"Since God has made earth, earth must make in her God,*
> *What hides within her breast she must reveal.*

In my loneliness, as I pondered this—the dominant message of his Yoga and refrain of his poetry—I realised as never before how self-willed we, his disciples, had been, how recalcitrant and unhelpful, more or less! And a remark of Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* recurred to me that each of us must be held responsible for the total misery and suffering of the world. I found it impossible now to dismiss this disquieting thought because I could no longer, alas, disclaim *my own* share of the responsibility: Did I not, I asked myself, follow my dark self-will every time he came to me with his lead of light? I cannot even now fully understand, far less explain, why I had gone on taking the stand I did against his gospel of faith when I had been persuaded at the very start that reason by itself could never deliver us out of the deep rut of the unenlightened ego, the primal parent of global misery! But now that he has departed let us no more waste our time on idle brooding but hark back to the Gita's assurance that no living fire of aspiration can peter out in ash. And has there ever breathed in these Godless days a fierier aspirant, a purer poet of the Spirit, a more musical "Messenger of the Incommunicable" than he? This thought lashed me as with a scourage in Varanasi (where I was collecting funds for the Ashram) on the 5th of December when I heard over the radio the news of his withdrawal. For I realised then, with a pang, how grievously even we had failed him—we, his disciples who, instead of lightening his burden had only rendered it heavier by our constant refusal to accept his message of the "greater Light above"—the Light he had chased with such a Godly ardour in a world where Grace is dismissed as a myth and faith derided as a phantom. But now that he has left us, it is idle to rue our past delinquencies and sigh over what *might have been*. Let us rather strive to accept his message in the firm faith that what he achieved and realised remains true for all times and for all aspirants, as he himself wrote to me once in one of his most moving letters containing perhaps the kernel of his faith and the guiding *mantra* of his life.

"As for faith," he wrote, "you write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than any one living now or before me that, having measured them, I am sure of my work. *But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible) I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I have to do and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe*. But why should I feel that all this may come to nothing when I see each step and where it is leading and every week and day—once it was every year and month and hereafter it will be every day and hour—brings me nearer to my goal? In the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and Night itself carries in it the burden of the Light that has to be."

I do not claim that we can hope to emulate him. But we shall be utterly false to him if we now assume an attitude of false humility pleading that we cannot possibly count. For it is because each of us, however small and insignificant, does count "in the economy of the universe", that he counted no cost in slaving for us sleeplessly to "bring the Immortal's knowledge into man's cave of birth."* To be called by him is to be chosen as his instruments, however inconspicuous, for his divine work, the task for which he sacrificed everything and dedicated all he had and was. I cannot honestly say that to me, personally, he is as good as living (as some others claim he is to them); but I do believe that what he achieved was for all times and all aspirants the world over, as otherwise one would have to conclude that he has failed, in the last analysis. To believe that would be disbelieving him since he asserted that he could not possibly fail. But not to disbelieve is not enough: we must, each of us, do his will with an one-pointed ardour which admits of no discouragement—that is the call of the hour. In other words, we must live up to his exhortation. But, for that to be possible, we must follow his lead in our inmost hearts claiming the legacy of his vision that destiny's iron law can be changed by the human will and indomitable aspiration because, to quote his words (Savitri III. IV):

> The high gods look on man and watch and choose
> Today's impossibles for the future's base.

A new faith burgeoned deep down in my core and a new vista opened when I beheld, for the last time, his statuesque face of bliss lying in regal repose of *Yoganidra* with an aureole around him which seemed reluctant to depart. The

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* Quoted from a poem of his published posthumously in LAST POEMS:

> *I have sailed the golden ocean*
> *And crossed the silver bar;*
> *I have reached the Sun of knowledge*
> *The earth-self's midnight star.........*
>
> *The Light was still around me*
> *When I came back to earth*
> *Bringing the Immortal's knowledge*
> *Into man's cave of birth.*

Goal is, indeed, still far and the path remains precipitous as ever. For all that, in rare moments one does still feel, even in this stifling world, a sense of vast release accruing through the strange dispensation of a Wisdom too far to be hailed as kin and, withal, too vivid to be dismissed as mere fantasy of a chance mood. And this can become more than a fugitive glimpse only if we aspire after it as single-mindedly as *he* did. For then alone will it be given to us to break the bars of the cage against which the prisoned Bird of Fire must go on beating its bleeding wings till the cage is transmuted by Divine Grace into a Temple of Love claiming kinship with the skies of Light—when

A greater truth than earth shall roof-in earth
And shed its sunlight on the roads of mind;
A power infallible shall lead the thought . . .
In earthly hearts kindle the Immortal's fire,
A soul shall wake in the Inconscient's house,
The mind shall be God-vision's tabernacle,
The body intuition's instrument,
And life a channel for God's visible power.

And in that hour

Even the multitude shall hear the Voice . . .
Humanity awake to the deepest self . . .
*And all the earth become a single life.**

* * *

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* Savitri . . . The Book of Everlasting Day

CHAPTER XIII

SRI AUROBINDO'S MESSAGE

SRI AUROBINDO was not a man easy to fathom, nor were his breath-taking messages all easy to understand. I remember once he wrote to me years ago, in 1928: "*Nobody except myself can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for man to see.*" Nevertheless, since then, a few notable biographers *have* written about his life as it has come within their purview and, within limits, they are good—that is, as far as they go. Only they do not—cannot—go far enough. I remember: in 1948, under a huge pandal in Calcutta, lecturer after lecturer spoke eloquently about his great gifts and achievements. Most of them spoke about his revolutionary zeal; a few about his deep erudition; some about his academic attainments, blaring flamboyantly that he stood first in Latin and Greek in Cambridge; some others dilated on his great sacrifice, courting prison and braving the hangman's noose (one of them quoted Kazi Nazrul Islam's famous poem "*phansir manche geye geche jara jibaner joygan*"—those who on the scaffold sang lone paeans to deathless life): some panegyrised his electric articles in the revolutionary days galvanising his frustrated countrymen out of their torpor of inactivity and despair; a sombre, whiskered Professor recited menacingly Rabindranath's famous poem "Salutation"*—probably the finest tribute that has been writen about him so far; a highbrow scholar enlarged on his greatness as a master of English prose and verse; but nobody except Barindra Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Roy spoke about the seer who sang of Man's power and dare to conquer grim Fate and, dying to his human ego, to be reborn to claim his lost heritage of Godhood. But how far have even they, his dear disciples, seen into the heart of the divine rapture or the import of the momentous vision of Krishna which had transformed him and made him write in 1939 (*Krishna, Last Poems*):

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* This magnificent poem, entitled *Namaskar,* was written by Rabindranath in Bengali in 1907, when Sri Aurobindo was arrested on a charge of sedition. To quote a few lines from Sri Khitish Chandra Sen's translation published later in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondichery:

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,
And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
Life shudders with a strange felicity;
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
Hoping her Lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

So I have often wondered whether we can ever possibly win even a clue to what he aspired to achieve through his breath-taking *sadhana* of the Supramental extending over four decades or the nature of the tremendous urge which had made him stake everything on attaining what he told me in 1942 he had "come for". (I have written about this in my book *Among the Great*, p. 359) Some armchair critics, alas, have raised their eyebrows and said: "Well, why gush over one who, after all, didn't achieve anything very tangible?" But I have often marvelled whether we can possible assess today the full impact on us and posterity of the light he had achieved and constantly radiated—the light which made Rabindranath write

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"Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!
O friend, my country's friend, O voice incarnate, free,
Of India's soul! ....
When I behold thy face, 'mid bondage, pain and wrong
And black indignities, I hear the soul's great song
Of rapture unconfined....." etc.

after his interview with him in 1927: "At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it. . . . His face was radiant with an inner light and . . . I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu *Rishi* spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. And I said to Him: You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world: *'Hearken to me!'*" (*Shrinvanthu vishve amritasya putrah—Shvetashvatar Upanishad*).

I had a talk about the great Sage with Rabindranath at his Calcutta residence directly after his return from Pondichery. He said that he had been deeply moved by his personality and spoke to me with bated breath about the "light" on his face (he used the word *dipti* in Bengali) and added with a smile: "I am also thinking of going into seclusion like him for some time." I laughed and said: "There you are wrong, Poet. We will chase you out of your cloister."

I refer to this lightly, but I don't mean to be flippant; I have mentioned it only to emphasize that no perceptive person who has seen Sri Aurobindo even once can have failed to be startled by something in him which cannot be put into words. When, in 1924, I first saw his self-luminous face, it just took my breath away and I wrote, describing my impression—to quote from my *Among the Great* (p. 204):

" 'A radiant personality!' sang the very air about him. A deep aura of peace encircled him, an ineffable yet concrete peace that drew you almost at once into its magic orbit."

Thereafter, everytime I saw him my blood broke out into song. Once, as I felt a rapturous heave in my heart, having glimpsed what he had come for, I sang:

Thou comst to announce: "Man must regain
The heritage he's born to win
Soul, pent in matter, shall attain
Through aspiration the Evergreen."

Not I alone, but all who came to him with an open mind had a glimpse, like Rabindranath, of the *Rishi* in him, the great seer who had announced in the *Upanishad*:

Vedaham etam Purhsham mahantam
Adityavarnam tamasah parastat

I know the One,
Great and effulgent like the sun,
Stationed beyond
The ambit of dark despond

This is not an overstatement. For I know of no true seeker who, after having received his hand-touch of blessing on his head, did not come back with a heave in his heart, his blood tingling. And those who have had even a speck of faith felt somewhat like the Jews who had marvelled about Christ and said that "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"—the authority that accrues to one who has seen the One stationed beyond our global gloom. That is why when we read his poems we cannot help but feel that it is not a mere work of art but the compelling vision of a Rishi or, shall we say, a seer-cum-minstrel, who cannot help but sing of what he has *seen*, as for instance when he writes in his heart-warming poem, *Who*:

"The Master of man and his infinite Lover,
He is close to our hearts, had we vision to see;
We are blind with our pride and the pomp of our passions,
We are bound in our thoughts where we hold ourselves free."

I say "compelling" because vision of Beauty at a certain intensity does create faith—only, may I add, that by beauty here I do not mean that purely formal loveliness which a mere artist fashions with his native gift or admirable skill. I speak here of that apocalyptic Beauty which, once visioned by the soul, confers on the seer the power to convince as e.g. it did on Sri Aurobindo when he wrote in the same poem:

> "*We will tell the whole world of his ways and his cunning:*
> *He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;*
> *He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,*
> *Then lures with His Joy and His Beauty again.*"

And is not such Beauty, *His* Beauty, all-pervasive?—

> "*All music is only the sound of His laughter,*
> *All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;*
> *Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal*
> *Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.*"

Unfortunately, however, those who have not been accorded even a fugitive glimpse of what a *Rishi* has visioned are apt to dub him a visionary, a dreamer. But those who have seen him and thrilled to his love's contact must feel they are blessed for having seen what so few have glimpsed: to wit, the love divine that flowers in him through Heaven's magic touch—the love about which he wrote to me in a letter, in 1934: "It is only divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine." It is this love—not the purely human love we humans know of, a blend of gold and alloy, but the inviolate love purged of its dross—which has inspired his epic poem, Savitri, in which he has portrayed his breath-taking vision of Divine Love with a mystic convincingness which though our intellect cannot understand, our hearts can never dismiss as a chimera.

I know, of course, that those who long to soar to the Empyrean on reason's feeble clay-wings must baulk at accepting his vision as valid. But those who have nursed even a spark of that flame-aspiration which is native to the soul cannot help but be moved by the utter sublimity of his prophecies because (as he put it in his inimitable language in Savitri): "Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse." So knowing full well how our "blind thoughts" constantly flounder and land us in pitfalls, he showed us how we can grow to see with the soul's third eye of faith that Heaven calls to us (in Christ's words) "not to destroy but to fulfil". Apropos, I am reminded of a question I once put to him when I was in the doldrums. He wrote back (April 1936): "As for your question whether Heaven wants Man, the answer is that if Heaven did not want him he would not want Heaven."

Years later, he improvised on this theme with the deeper suggestiveness of poetry (Savitri 1. IV):

"A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as He put ours."

which is the reason why (ibid 11, I):

"Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
The forge where the Arch-mason shapes his works"

Then, as though to bring out the full import of Krishna's famous dictum:

No sincere endeavour ever peters out
To leave things where they were; aye, even a spark
Of aspiration silvers clouds of fear, (Gita, 2.40)

he exhorted us to hark back to the eternal values as against the temporal and disown the besetting fear of failure, assuring us (ibid 1.2):

"A prayer, a master act, a king idea
Can link man's faith to a transcendent Force."

and so, it is not an overstatement that

"One mighty deed can change the course of things."

Thus he vindicated his deep vision of the Soul's insistence on ultimate victory over Fate's "iron law" and Matter's down-pull (ibid, 2.4):

"The life that wins its aims asks greater aims,
The life that fails and dies must live again . . .
Till he (man) has found himself he cannot cease."

And he cannot halt or rest in a half-way house because (ibid 1.4):

"We are sons of God and must be even as He:
His human portion, we must grow divine,
Our life is a paradox with God for key"

The time-old "paradox" has its roots in the deep hiatus between Matter and Spirit in that if one denied a superconscient Spirit sustaining earth-life, on the ground that nothing unattested by one's mind and senses can be accepted as 'real' then one must land plop in rank materialism and repudiate any divine purpose in life. One must, because such a purpose being beyond the mental comprehension, one cannot help but dub the world an impossible creation which has, somehow, been fathered by chance. But no seer worth his salt can accept such a solution because he has *seen* what the Sage Narad asserts (ibid, 6.2):

This world was not built with random bricks of chance,
A blind God is not our destiny's architect:
A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,
There is a meaning in each curve and line.

So why give in to despair or depression bred by failures when the ultimate victory is certain, because (ibid, 6.2):

"The spirit rises mightier by defeat;
Its godlike wings grow wider with each fall,
Its splendid failures sum to victory."

They must, because (ibid 3.4):

"The high gods look on man and watch and choose
Today's impossibles for the future's base."

And so Sri Aurobindo, the born missionary of the Spirit, with the light of morning in his eyes, teaches us every time through his art and words, his acts and withdrawals—aye, even through his gestures and long spells of silence—that when one is called by God one must leave aside all other calls—of lesser loves. Which is why he declined, when adjured by his countrymen, to come out of his seclusion to resume his political leadership. He had to, as a man must die to his old self of personal ambition and desires before he can be reborn to the creative freedom of the divine life:

"All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made."
(ibid 3.2)

Is this not a noble commentary on India's hoariest wisdom:

Twameva viditwa ati mrityum eti
Nanyah pantha vidyate ayaynaya (Shvetashvatar)

Only when man has known the One, he wins
To Immortality; there is no other
Easier ascent to pinnacle salvation.

It is not possible here even to touch on all that this great Messiah taught us through what he had become (He wrote to me once: *"The ultimate value of a man is not to be measured by what he says nor even by what he does, but by what he becomes."*) But I feel that his greatest message was the one which, when he was in the Alipore jail, Krishna had so thrillingly missioned him to convey to us all. There, just when his faith had wavered, the Lord of the Gita had come to him in person and revealed to His "rare great-souled devotee that all was Vasudeva"* and said (to quote his own resonant words):

"... *His strength entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Srikrishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, they were grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayan who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arm of Srikrishna around me—the arms of my Friend and Lover.*" *(Uttarpara Speech)*

And the Friend and Lover said to Him: "*I have given you a work and it is to help and uplift this nation.... I am raising up this nation to send forth My word. This is the Sanatana Dharma, this is the eternal religion which you did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you. The agnostic and the sceptic in you have been answered, for I have given you proofs within and without you, physical and subjective, which have satisfied you. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When, therefore, it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand*

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* *Vasudevah savam iti sa mahatma sudurlabhah* (The Gita, 7.191).

*and extend itself over the world. It is for the Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists."**

So he concluded his momentous speech with: "I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the *Sanatana Dharma* which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the *Sanatana Dharma,* with it it moves and with it it grows. When the *Sanatana Dharma* declines, then the nation declines and if the Sanatana Dharma were capable of perishing, with the *Sanatana Dharma* it would perish. The *Sanatana Dharma*, that is nationalism. This is the message that I have to speak to you."

Thereafter he stayed loyal all his life, for well over four decades, to this mission of his which he expressed afterwards so vibrantly in his Savitri (Book of Everlasting Day):

"I lay my hands upon thy soul of flame,
I lay my hands upon thy heart of love,
I yoke thee to my power of work in Time.
Because thou hast obeyed my timeless will,
Because thou hast chosen to share earth's struggle and fate
And leaned in pity over earth-bound men
And turned aside to help and yearned to save,

---

* Na jatu kaman na bhayan na lobhat
Dharmam tyajet jeevitasyapi hetoh
Nityo dharmah sukha-duhkhe anitye
Jeevo nityo hetur asya tvanityah.

* * *

Thou shalt not disown dharma on earth, impelled
By greed, concupiscence or fear, for know
That dharma is eternal, whereas joy
And pain are transient; the soul is everliving,
Although its basis in the world's unstable.

—Cf. Mahabharat—Last Canto.

I bind by thy heart's passion thy heart to mine
And lay my splendid yoke upon thy soul.
Now will I do in thee my marvellous works.
I will fasten thy nature with my cords of strength,
Subdue to my delight thy spirit's limbs
And make thee a vivid knot of all my bliss,
And build in thee my proud and crystal home."

And then:

"Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,
My garden of life to plant a seed divine.
When all thy work in human time is done,
The mind of earth shall be a home of light,
The body of earth a tabernacle of God."

Till lastly:

"A heavenlier passion shall upheave men's lives,
Their minds shall share in the ineffable gleam,
Their hearts shall feel the ecstasy and the fire,
Earth's bodies shall be conscious of a soul;
Mortality's bond-slaves shall unloose their bonds,
Mere men into spiritual beings grow
And see awake the dumb divinity."

Then the gulf between Matter and Spirit shall be finally bridged, and:

"The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's Face."

GLOSSARY

Sri Aurobindo had to employ some English words in a somewhat new sense to explain certain experiences. These only need be included in this glossary as they occur frequently in his letters quoted in this book:

AVATAR:

An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the Presence and Power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action; he feels identified inwardly with this Divine Power and Presence.

A Vibhuti is supposed to embody some power of the Divine and is enabled by it to act with great force in the world, but that is all that is necessary to make him a Vibhuti: the power may be very great but the consciousness is not that of an inborn or indwelling Divinity. This is the distinction we can gather from the Gita which is the main authority on this subject. If we follow this distinction, we can confidently say from what is related of them that Rama and Krishna can be accepted as Avatars; Buddha figures as such although with a more impersonal consciousness of the Power within him. Ramakrishna voiced the same consciousness when he spoke of Him who was Rama and who was Krishna, being within him. But Chaitanya's case is peculiar; for according to the accounts he ordinarily felt and declared himself a bhakta of Krishna and nothing more, but in great moments he manifested Krishna, grew luminous in mind and body and was Krishna himself and spoke and acted as the Lord. His contemporaries saw in him an Avatar of Krishna, a manifestation of the Divine Love.

Shankara and Vivekananda were certainly Vibhutis; they cannot be reckoned as more, though as Vibhutis they were very great.

It is not my intention to question in any degree Chaitanya's position as an Avatar of Krishna and the Divine Love. That character of the manifestation appears very clearly from all the accounts about him and even, if what is related about the appearance of Krishna in him from time to time is accepted, these outbursts of the splendour of the Divine Being are among the most remarkable in the story of the Avatar. As for Ramakrishna, the manifestation in him was not so intense but more many-sided and fortunately there can be no doubt about the authenticity of details of his talk and actions since they have been recorded from day to day occurences by so competent an observer as M. I. would not care to enter into any comparison as between these two great spiritual personalities; both exercised an extraordinary influence and did something supreme in their own sphere.

"But also the higher divine consciousness of the Purushottama may itself descend into the humanity and that of the Jiva disappear into it. This is said by his contemporaries to have happened in the occasional transfigurations of Chaitanya when he who in his normal consciousness was only the lover and devotee of the Lord and rejected all deification, became in these abnormal moments the Lord himself and so spoke and acted, with all the outflooding light and love and power of the divine Presence."

BEING:

The psychic being by which he means the Purusha in the heart which supports by its presence the action of the mind, life and body. It is the conscious form of the soul. "The psychic part of us," he writes in a letter, "is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with divine possibilities that supports the lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body. . . . It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality which we call usually the psychic being." He has often used the adjective *psychic* to mean this higher movement. Sometimes he has used the *psychic* as an abbreviation omitting *being*.

The vital being by which he means the being behind life-force. He writes in one of his letters: "There are four parts of the vital being—first the *mental vital* which gives a mental expression by thought, speech or otherwise to the emotions, desires, passions, sensations and other movements of the vital being." Those who would know more about his classification must be referred to the first volume of his Letters! We need be concerned here only with his definition of two more of these.

The higher vital by which he means "that larger movement of the conscious life-force which is concerned with creation, with power and force and conquest, with giving and self-giving . . . throwing itself out in the wider movements of life, responsive to the greater objects of Nature.

The lower vital by which he implies "the pettier movements of action and desire" such as "all physical sensations, hungers, cravings, satisfactions . . . lusts, greed of all kinds, vanity, small ambitions, petty anger, envy, jealousy" etc.

Bhakti: devotion

Bhava: the idea behind, associations

Gurubhai: brother disciple

Mayavad: the doctrine that life is a maya, illusion

Sadhaka: a spiritual aspirant

Sadhana: practice of discipline for God-realisation

Swabhava: the bhava or nature native; the law of one's being

Tapasya: Sri Aurobindo often uses the Greek word askesis; it means spiritual effort with the last stress on protracted austerities.

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BANARAS

THE AUTHOR

Dilip Kumar Roy, who first achieved fame throughout India as a singer, comes from a rich and cultured family in Bengal, where he has long been regarded as a cultured leader of the Artistic Renaissance in Bengal A friend of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore. Romain Rolland and Bertrand Russell and a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, he first made his mark for himself as a writer in English. He had started his career as a singer. Mahatma Gandhi once said of him : "I May make bold to claim that very few persons in India – or rather in the world – have a voice like his, so rich and sweet and intense." So far he has written more than sixty books in Bengali and about a dozen in English. But his *granade passion* has always been his deep thirst for the spiritual life. It was this irresistible Call that made him forsake all that men hold dear to seek Sri Aurobindo's guidance in 1928. Dr. Srinivas Iyengar says in his Foreword to this book : "This admirable new book is challengingly entitled, *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*. The inversion is masterly. Dilip didn't go to Sri Aurobindo : *Sri Aurobindo Came to ;Dilip !* . Hasn't Sri Aurobindo himself declared to Dilip:

"Even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had the relation which declares itself constantly through many lives .. .. It is a feeling which is never mistaken and gives the impression of one not only close to one but a part of one's existence."

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